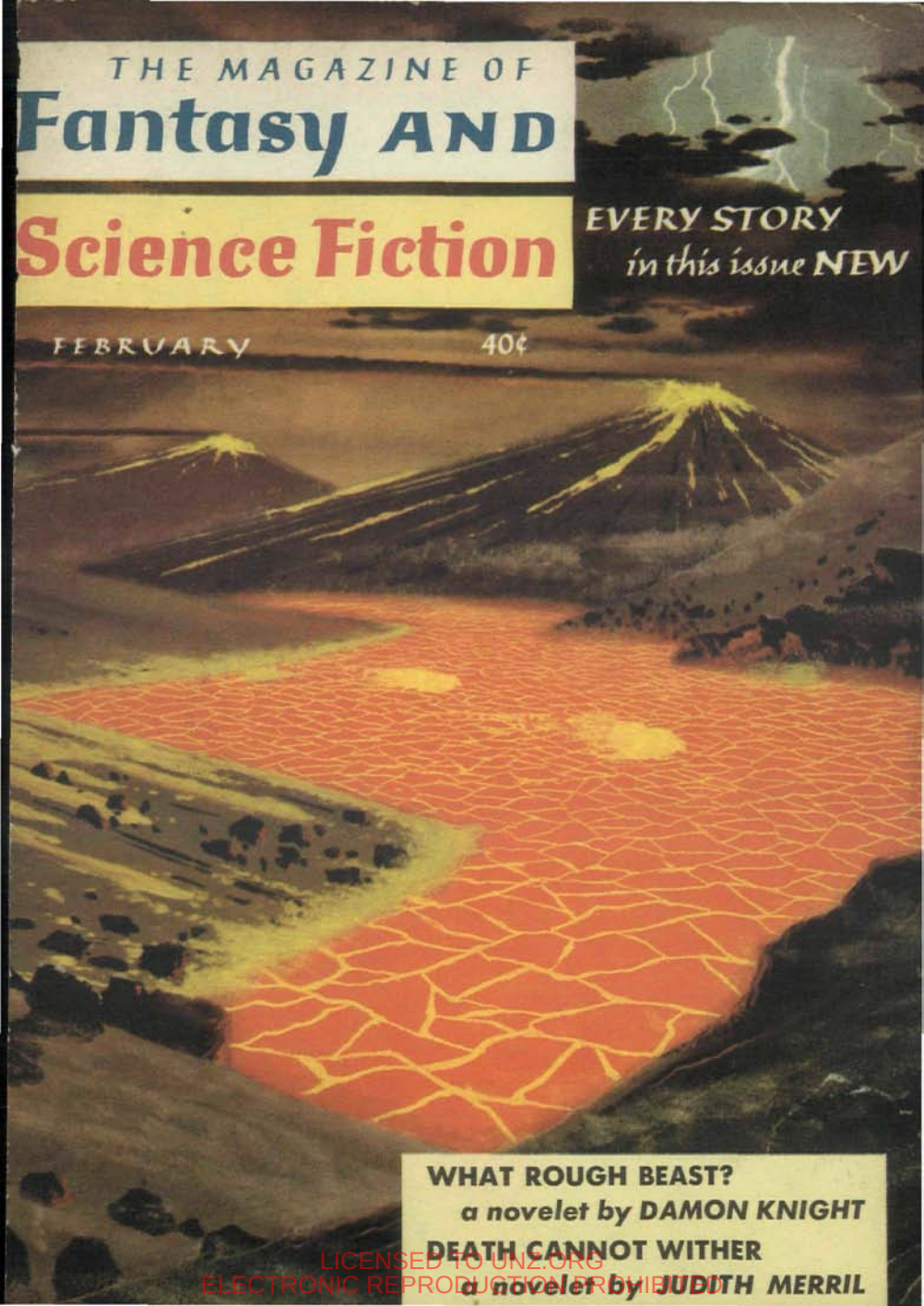

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 16, No. 2 FEBRUARY

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Cover by Chesley Bonestell—"Under the surface of Jupiter's red spot"

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Robert P. Mills,* EDITOR

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An open letter to our readers

Dear Reader:

For many months we have fought to maintain the original 35¢ price for The Magazine of FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. Now it is no longer possible and the price is being changed to 40¢ a copy, $4.50 a year, beginning with this issue.

You may be interested to know what has been happening to publication costs during the past ten years; paper costs have gone up 38%, composition, printing, binding, and handling costs have gone up 32%, postage costs have gone up from 33% to 60%, and various other costs have risen as much or more since 1949 when F&SF was first launched.

As prices go up, so should quality—and we shall do our best to observe that rule. In this issue, for example, in addition to the usual top stories and top authors, we bring you three fine writers who have not before appeared here: Joel Townsley Rogers, Eleazar Lipsky, and Jane Rice.

Next month we will have a special ALL-NEW, ALL-STAR Issue, featuring such writers as Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein, Poul Anderson, Howard Fast, Zenna Henderson, Alfred Bester, and many others. Further, we have some exciting new projects in the works for future issues.

We can assure you that F&SF will continue to bring you the finest selection of science fiction and fantasy stories available in any one magazine, anywhere in the world. To be *certain* of receiving it regularly, fill in the money-saving coupon on page 130.

J. W. Ferman
Publisher

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Mike Kronski knew that he was not performing miracles, because Mike knew the physical laws that make it possible, for example, to turn a one-dollar bill into a five. What Mike did not yet know was on what occasions he had the moral right to use his talent...

WHAT ROUGH BEAST?

by Damon Knight

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand....

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

—William Butler Yeats, *"The Second Coming"*

MR. FRANK SAID TO ME, "HEY, YOU. Get that corner cleaned up." He was big man with red face, mouth always open little bit, wet lips always pulling back quick over little yellow teeth. This I remember, late at night, just after rush from theaters and before bars close. Place was empty, all sick light on the tiles and brown tabletops. Outside, dark and wet. People going by with coat collars turned up and faces blue-gray like rain.

On corner table was some dishes, some food spilled. I cleaned up, put dishes in kitchen sink on top of big stack, then came back to Mr. Frank. He was cutting tomato for sandwiches, using his knife too quick and hard. The end of his big thumb was white from holding knife.

I said to him, "Mr. Frank, I work here three weeks and you call me 'Hey, you.' My name is Kronski. If is too hard to remember, say Mike. But not 'hey, you.'"

He looked down on me, with lips pulling away from yellow teeth. The sides of his nose turned yellow-white, like I saw before when he was mad. And his knife

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went cut. He sucked air between teeth, and grabbed his hand. I saw the blood coming out dark as ink from the side of his thumb. Blood was dripping dark on board and pieces of tomato. It was deep cut, bleeding hard. He said through teeth, "Now look what you made me do. Christ!"

From other end of counter, Mr. Harry called out, "What's the matter?" He started toward us—a thin man, bald, with big eyes blinking all time like afraid.

Was my fault. I went quickly to Mr. Frank, but he pushed me away with his elbow. "Get off of me, you creep!"

Now Mr. Harry looked on Mr. Frank's thumb and he whistled, then turned and went to the medicine box on wall. Mr. Frank was holding his wrist and swearing. From the cashier's desk at front of cafeteria, Mr. Wilson the night manager was coming. I heard his footsteps on the tiles.

Mr. Harry was trying to put bandage on, but it would not stick. Mr. Frank pushed him out of the way, shouting, "God damn it!" and pulled the medicine box off wall. Always bleeding.

I got quickly a fork and handkerchief, not clean, but best I could do. I tied a knot in the handkerchief, and tried to put it around Mr. Frank's wrist, but he pushed me away again.

"Give me that," said Mr. Harry, and he took from me the fork and handkerchief. Now Mr. Frank was leaning back against coffee machine looking white, and Mr. Harry slipped the handkerchief over his wrist.

Always was blood, over counter, duckboards, steam tables, everything. Mr. Harry tried to tighten the fork, but he dropped it and picked up. He took it saying, "Get out of the way, will you?" and started to turn the handkerchief.

"Better call a hospital," said Mr. Wilson's voice behind me. Then, "Look out!"

Mr. Frank had his eyes turned up and mouth open. His knees started to bend and then he was falling, and Mr. Harry tried to catch, but too late, and he also went down.

Mr. Wilson was going around end of counter, so I went the other way to telephone.

Was in my pocket, no dimes. I thought to go back and ask, but it would take minute. I thought maybe Mr. Frank would die, because I was not quick. So I put fingers in the metal hole where coin is supposed to come back, and was no coin there; but I felt deeper, down where turning place was, and I found it and I turned. Then, was a dime lying in coin hole. So I took it and put in top of telephone. I called ambulance for Mr. Frank.

Then I went back to where he was lying, and they were by his

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side squatting, and Mr. Wilson looked up and said, "Did you call the hospital?" I said yes, but without listening he said, "Well, get out of the way then. Harry, you take the feet and we'll straighten him out a little."

I could see Mr. Frank's red shirt front, and hand wrapped now in gauze, also red, with tourniquet around his wrist. He was lying without moving.

I went to stand at end of the counter, out of way. I was feeling very bad for Mr. Frank. I saw he was mad, and I knew he was cutting with knife, so it was my fault.

After long while came a policeman, and he looked on Mr. Frank, and I told how it happened. Mr. Harry and Mr. Wilson also told, but they could not tell all, because they did not see from beginning. Then came ambulance, and I asked Mr. Wilson could I go with Mr. Frank to hospital. So he said, "Go on, I don't care. We won't need you here after tonight, anyhow, Kronski." He looked on me from bright glasses. He was gray-haired man, very neat, who alway spoke cheerful but thought suspicious. I liked Mr. Harry, and even Mr. Frank, but him I could never like.

So I was fired. Not new feeling for me. But I thought how in year, two years, or even sooner, those men would forget I was ever alive.

I was working in place three weeks, night shift, cleaning up tables and stacking dishes in sink for dishwasher. It is not enough to make a place different because you are there. But if you make no difference, you are not living.

At the hospital, they wheeled Mr. Frank up indoors and took him in elevator. Hospital woman asked me questions and wrote down on a big paper, then policeman came again, and was more questions.

"Your name is Michael Kronski, right? Been in this country long?"

"Since twenty years." But I told a lie, was only one month. Policeman said, "You didn't learn English very good, did you?"

"For some is not easy."

"You a citizen?"

"Sure."

"When naturalized?"

I said, "Nineteen Forty-one." But it was a lie.

He asked more questions, was I in army, how long belong to union, where I worked before, and always I would lie. Then he closed book.

"All right, you stick around till he comes to. Then if he says there was no assault, you can go on home."

In hospital was quiet like grave. I sat on hard bench. Sometimes doors opened, doctor shoes squeaked on floor. Then telephone went *brr* very quiet, hospital wo-

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man picked up and talked so I could not hear. She was blonde, I think from bottle, with hard lines in cheeks.

She put down telephone, talked to policeman for minute, then he came over to me. "Okay, they fixed him up. He says he did it himself. You a friend of his?"

"We work together. *Did* work. Is something I can do?"

"They're going to let him go, they need the bed. But somebody ought to go home with him. I got to get back on patrol."

"I will take him to his home, yes."

"Okay." He sat down on bench, looked on me. "Say, what kind of an accent is that, anyhow? You Chesky?"

"No." I would say yes, but this man had the face of a Slav. I was afraid he should be Polish. Instead, I told different lie. "Russian. From Omsk."

"No," he said slow, looking on me hard, and then spoke some words in Russian. I did not understand, it was too different from Russiche, so I said nothing.

"Nyet?" asked policeman, looking on me with clear grey eyes. He was young man, big bones in cheeks and jaw, and lines of smiling around mouth.

Just then came down the elevator with Mr. Frank and nurse. He had a big white bandage on hand. He looked on me and turned away.

Policeman was writing in his book. He looked on me again. He said something more in Russian. I did not know the words, but one of them was like word for "pig" in Russiche. But I said nothing, looked nothing.

Policeman scratched his head. "You say you're from Russia, but you don't understand the language. How come?"

I said, "Please, when we leave Russia, I was young boy. In house was speaking only Yiddish."

"Yeah? Ir zent ah Yidishe' ying!?"

"Vi den?"

Now was better, but still he did not look happy. "And you only spoke Yiddish in the home?"

"Sometimes French. My mother spoke French, also my aunt."

"Well—that might account for it, I guess." He closed book and put away. "Look, you got your naturalization papers on you?"

"No, is home in box."

"Well, hell, you ought to carry them on you. Times like these. You remember what I said. All right, take it easy now."

I looked up, and was no Mr. Frank. I went quickly to desk. "Where did he go?"

Woman said very cold, "I don't know what you mean." Each word separate, like to child.

"Mr. Frank, was just here."

She said, "Down the hall, the payment office." And pointed with yellow pencil over her shoulder.

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I went, but in hall I stopped to look back. Policeman was leaning over desk to talk with woman, and I saw his book in pocket. I knew there would be more questions, maybe tomorrow, maybe next week. I took long breath, and closed eyes. I reached down where turning place of book was. I found it, and turned. I felt it happen.

Policeman never noticed; but next time he would look in book, would be no writing about me. Maybe would be empty pages, maybe something else written. He would remember, but without writing is no good.

Mr. Frank was by window in hall, pale in face, arguing with man in office. I came up, I heard him say, "Twenty-three bucks, ridiculous."

"It's all itemized, sir." Man inside pointed to piece of paper in Mr. Frank's hand.

"Anyway, I haven't got that much."

I said quickly, "I will pay." I took out purse.

"I don't want your money," said Mr. Frank. "Where would you get twenty-three bucks? Let the workmen's pay for it."

"Please, for me is pleasure. Here, you take." I pushed money at man behind window.

"All right, give him the God damn money," said Mr. Frank, and turned away.

"That's it," said Mr. Frank. Was street of old thin houses, with stone steps coming down like they would stick out all their gray tongues together. I paid the taxi driver, and helped Mr. Frank up steps. "What floor you live?"

"Fourth. I can make it."

But I said, "No, I help you," and we went up stairs. Mr. Frank was very weak, very tired, and now his lips did not pull back over teeth any more.

We went down long hall into kitchen and Mr. Frank sat down by table under the sour yellow light. He leaned his head on hand. "I'm all right. Just let me alone now, okay?"

"Mr. Frank, you are tired. Eat something now, then sleep."

He did not move. "What sleep? In three hours I got to be on my day job."

I looked on him. Now I understood why was cutting so hard with knife, why was so quick anger.

"How long you worked two jobs?" I said.

He leaned back in chair and put his hand with white bandage on the table. "Year and a half."

"Is no good. You should quit one job."

"What the hell do you know about it?"

I wanted to ask more, but then behind me the door opened and someone came in. I looked, and it was young girl in a blue bathrobe, pale without makeup, hold-

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ing bathrobe closed at her neck. She looked on me once, then said to Mr. Frank, "Pop? What's the matter?"

"Ah, I cut my damn hand. He brought me home."

She went to table. "Let me see."

"It don't amount to nothing. Come on, Anne, don't fuss, will you?"

She stepped back, once more looking on me. She had good face, thin, with strong bones. She said, like talking to herself, "Well, don't let me bother you." She turned and went out, and door closed.

Mr. Frank said after minute, "You want a drink or anything? Cup of coffee?" He was still sitting same way at table.

"No, no thanks, thanks just same. Well, I think now I will go."

"All right. Take care yourself. See you at work."

I went out, and for minute could not remember which end of hall was door. Then I remembered we turn right to go in kitchen, so I turned left, and found door at end of hall and went outside.

In little light, Anne was standing part bent over, looking on me with big eyes. I stood and could not move. It was not outside hall, it was some other room —I could see part of dressing table, and bed, and then I saw she had bathrobe pulled down from shoulder and was leaning to look in mirror. Then she covered up shoulder quickly, but not before I saw what was there.

She said in hard quiet voice, "Get out of here. What's the matter with you?"

And I wanted to move away, but could not. I took instead one step toward her and said, "Let me see it."

"What?" She could not believe.

"The burn. Let me see, because I know I can help you."

She had hand tight at her neck, holding the bathrobe together, and she said, "What do you know about—"

"I can do it," I said. "Do you understand? If you want, I will help." I stopped, and stood waiting and looking on her.

In the small light I could see that her face got pink, and the eyes very bright. She said very hard, "You can't," and looked away. She was crying.

I said, "Believe me."

She sat down and after minute she took hard breath and opened the bathrobe from shoulder. "All right, look then. Pretty?"

I took one more step and was close. I could see her neck, smooth and like cream. But on the shoulder and across the chest was skin hard and white, standing up in strings and lumps, like something that would melt and boil, and then harden.

She had her head down, and

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eyes shut, crying. I was crying also, and inside was big hurt trying to get out. I touched her with my hand, and I said, "My dear."

She jumped when hand touched her, but then sat still. I felt under my fingertips cold skin, touch like lizard. Inside me was big hurt jumping, I could not hold in very long. I rubbed her very easy, very slow with my fingers, looking and feeling where was inside the wrong kind of skin. Was not easy to do. But if I did not do it this way, then I knew I would do it without wanting, all at once, and it would be worse.

To make well all at once is no good. Each cell must fit with next cell. With my fingertips I felt where down inside the bottom part of bad skin was, and I made it turn, and change to good skin, one little bit at a time.

She sat still and let me do it. After while she said, "It was a fire, two years ago. Pop left a blowtorch lit, and I moved it, and there was a can of plastic stuff with the top off. And it went up—"

I said, "Not to talk. Not necessary. Wait. Wait." And always I rubbed softly the bad skin.

But she could not bear to have me rub without talking, and she said, "We couldn't collect anything. It said right on the can, keep away from flame. It was our fault. I was in the hospital twice. They fixed it, but it just grew back the same way. It's what they call keloid tissue."

I said, "Yes, yes, my dear, I know."

Now was one layer on the bottom, soft skin instead of hard; and she moved a little in the chair, and said small voice, "It feels better."

Under my fingertips the skin was still hard, but now more soft than before. When I pushed it, was not like lizard any more, but like glove.

I worked, and she forgot to be ashamed until came a noise at door opening at front of apartment. She sat up straight, looking around and then on me. Her face got pink again, she grabbed my wrist. "What are you *doing*?"

In minute I knew she would jump up and pull her bathrobe, and then maybe she would yell, so whatever happened, it would not be her fault.

But I could not let her do it. I was also ashamed, and my ears like on fire, but to stop now was impossible. I said loud, "No, sit down." I held her in the chair, and kept my fingers on her skin. I did not look up, but I heard Mr. Frank's feet come into room.

I heard him say, "Hey, you. What do you think you're up to?"

And the girl was trying to get up again, but I held her still, and I said, "Look. Look." With

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tears running down my cheeks.

Under my fingers was a little place of good, soft skin, smooth like cream. While I moved my fingers, slowly this place got bigger. She looked down, and she forgot to breathe.

From corner of my eye, I saw Mr. Frank come nearer, with face mad and wondering. He said once more, "Hey," with lips pulling back hard over teeth, and then he looked on shoulder of his daughter. He blinked eyes like not believing, and then looked again. He put his hand on it, quick, hard, and then took away like burned.

Now was changing more fast the rest of skin. Was like rubbing from a window the frost. Still they were not moving, the daughter and Mr. Frank, and then he went down on knees beside chair with arm around her and arm around me holding so hard that it hurt, and we were all three tight together, all three hot wet faces.

Since I was small boy in Novo Russie—what they call here Canada, but it is all different—always I could see where beside this world is many other worlds, so many you could not count. To me is hard thing to understand that other people only see what is here.

But then I learned also to reach, not with hands but with mind. And where this world touches other world, I learned to turn so that little piece of it would be different. At first I did this without knowing, when I was very sick, and frightened that I would die. Without knowing it I reached, and turned, and suddenly, I was not sick. Doctor was not believing, and my mother prayed a long time, because she thought God saved my life by a miracle.

Then I learned I could do it. When I learned badly in school, or if something else I would not like would happen, I could reach and turn, and change it. Little by a little, I was changing pieces of world.

At first was not so bad, because I was young boy and I only did things for myself, my own pleasure.

But then I was growing up, and it was making me sad to see how other people were unhappy. So then I would begin to change more. My father had a bad knee, I made it well. Our cow broke her neck and died. And I made her alive again.

First I was careful, then not so careful. And at last they saw that I did it.

Then everyone said I was going to be a great rabbi, they prayed over me, and they talked to me so much that I believed it.

And I worked miracles.

Then one day I began to see that what I did was bad. I made so many patches in world that it

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was not world any more, but mistake. If you would try to make chair better by many patches, putting a piece oak wood here, and piece cherry wood there, until all was patches, you would make a worse chair than before.

So I saw every day that I was only making more patches, but I would not let myself know it was bad. And at last I could not bear it, and I reached back far, I changed not little bit, but whole country. I reached back before I was born, and I turned, and I changed it.

And when I looked up, all world around me was different—houses, fields, people.

My father's house was not there. My mother, my brothers, my sisters, they were all gone; and I could not bring them back.

After I fixed Anne's shoulder, it was like party, with wine on table, and Italian bread and sweet butter, and salami, and what they call here bagels, and from radio in next room, music playing loud and happy. Pretty soon from across hall came a lady named Mrs. Fabrizi to complain from noise, and in two minutes she was also one of party, hugging Anne and crying, then talking and laughing louder than the rest of us. Next from upstairs it was young man, Dave Sims, painter, and also joined us. Mrs. Fabrizi went back to her apartment and brought some lasagna, which is with pasta and cheese, and very good, and from upstairs Dave brought bottle of whisky. We all loved each other, and to look on each other made us laugh because we all were so happy. Anne was now with lipstick and her hair combed, and she was wearing a blue evening dress with no top. She could not keep her hand from touching smooth place on her shoulder and chest, and every time she would touch it, she would stop like surprised. But she was worried because new skin was brown, not white like cream, and it made a patch you could see.

But I explained to her, "Is because if you would not have accident, then you would go often to beach and get brown. So when I turn where you do not have accident, that skin is brown, you see?"

"I don't get it, at all," said Dave, and I could see from their faces, they did not understand either. So I said, "Look. From time God made the world, if a thing was possible, it must happen. Right? Because otherwise it would not be God." I looked on Mrs. Fabrizi, I knew she was religious woman, but in her eyes was no understanding.

Dave said slowly, "You mean, wait a minute— You mean, if a thing is possible, but doesn't happen, that would limit God's pow-

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ers, is that it? His powers of creation, or something?"

I nodded. "Yes, that is it."

He leaned over table. On one side Anne and Frank were also leaning, and on other side Mrs. Fabrizi, but still only Dave understanding.

"But look," he said, "plenty of things that could happen, don't. Like this pickle—I *could* throw it on the floor, but I'm not going to, I'm going to eat it." And he took a bite, and grinned. "See? It didn't happen."

But I said, "It did. It happened that you threw it on floor. Look." And while I said it, I reached and turned, and when they looked where I pointed, there was pickle on the floor.

Then they all laughed like joke, and Frank slapped Dave on back, saying, "That's a good one on you!" And it was a minute before I saw they thought it was only joke, and that I threw pickle on floor myself.

Dave was also laughing, but waving at me the piece of pickle in his hand. "I've got the trump card," he said. "Right here—see? I didn't throw it, I ate it."

But I said, "No, you didn't." And once more I turned, and in his fingers was no pickle.

Then they all laughed more than ever, except Dave, and after minute Anne touched her chest and stopped laughing too. Frank was poking Dave in shirt, and saying, "Where is it? Hah? Where is it?" Then he also stopped and looked on me. Only Mrs. Fabrizi laughed, and her high voice sounded like hen until Frank said, "Pipe down a second, Rosa, for Pete's sake."

Dave looked on me and said, "How did you do that?"

I was warm inside from the wine and whiskey, and I said, "I try to explain to you. If a thing is possible, somewhere it happens. It must happen, otherwise God is not God. Do you see? It is like each world is a card in a deck of cards. Each one, little bit different. Annie, in some worlds you had accident, and in some worlds you did not have it. So I reach, and turn, one little place at a time. Wherever I turn, it can be a little place like head of match, or it can be big like a building. And it can be from a long time ago, hundred years, five hundred years, or only minute. So always I think of place I turn like this: it is a shape like ice-cream cone. Here on top is what we see now, then down here at bottom is little dot, week ago, or year ago. If long time ago, cone is long—if short time ago, cone is short. But from little sharp dot at the bottom comes all this cone, and makes here at the top all things different."

"Let me get this straight," said Dave, running had through hair. "You mean, if you change any

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little thing in the past, then everything that happened afterward has to be different?"

I said, "Yes. Only I do not really change, because all these things exist already. I cannot make another world, but I can reach, and take piece of another world where it already is, and bring here so that you see it. So with Anne, before—I turn one little bit of skin, then another little bit of skin. And I make good skin come where bad skin was. So it is colored brown, because in worlds where you did not have accident, you went to beach and became brown."

They all looked on me. Frank said, "*This is still too deep for* me. What do you mean, you turn —?" He made twisting motion with his fingers.

I said, "It is like revolving door. Suppose should be little tiny revolving door—or I can make it big, any size—but suppose on one side is one world, on other side, another world. So I turn—" I showed them with my hands—"until little piece of this world is here, and little piece of that world there. That's what I mean when I turn."

Frank and Dave sat back and looked on each other, and Frank made blowing sound with his lips. "Hell, you could do anything," he said.

"Not anything. No."

"Well, damn near. Jesus Christ, when I start to thinking about—" Then he and Dave were talking all together. I heard ". . . cure every sick person . . ." ". . . water into wine . . ." ". . . wait a minute, what about . . ." After while Mrs. Fabrizi yelled, "Wait. Waita, you men. Can you fixa my kitch' a-ceiling?"

Then they all began to laugh and shout, and I did not know why it was a joke, but I laughed too, and we all went to Mrs. Fabrizi's apartment, laughing and hanging on to each other not to fall down.

Next morning before I was awake, they were in living room talking, and when I came out, *they could not wait to tell me* ideas. From remembering the night before I was ashamed, but they made me sit down and drink coffee, and then Anne brought eggs, and not to make her feel bad, I eat.

Always, if I do good for someone, I should do it in secret like a robber. I know this. So, if I would have climbed in window when Anne was sleeping, and fix shoulder, then would be no trouble. But no, I let myself be sad for her, I fix it with big scene, and then worse, I am full of wine, I talk big, and I fix kitchen ceiling. So now I was in trouble.

They were looking on me with such love in eyes that I was inside like butter melting. First it

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was, "Mike you are so wonderful," and "Mike how can we ever thank you," and then pretty soon they wanted to see some trick, because they still could not believe. So like a fool, I threw a nickel on table, and showed them where it was possible nickel should land here, here, or here. And each place, I turned, and was another nickel until was on table ten of them in a row. And to them it was as if I should make water flow from the rock.

Then Anne was pink and holding hands tight together, but she said to me, "Mike, if you wouldn't mind—Mrs. Fabrizi has an old gas stove that—"

Then Mrs. Fabrizi began to shout no, no, and Frank also said, "No, let him eat his breakfast," but Anne would not stop and said, "Honestly, it's dangerous, and the landlord won't do anything." So I said I would go and look.

In the apartment across the hall I saw clean new ceiling in kitchen where should be old one falling down in pieces, but I looked away quickly. The gas stove was like Anne said, old, with leaky pipes, everywhere rust and with one side on bricks because leg was gone. "She might have an explosion any day," Anne said, and I saw it was true. So I reached, and turned to where was new gas stove.

They could not understand that whatever I give, I must take away. To this Mrs. Fabrizi I gave a new ceiling, yes, and new stove too, but from some other Mrs. Fabrizi I took away new ceiling, new stove, and gave old ones instead. With Anne's shoulder it was different, because I took from each other Anne only one little cell; and the nickels I took from myself. But again I was a fool, and to me Mrs. Fabrizi's gasp of wonder was like food to starving.

So when Anne said, "Mike, how about new furniture?" and again Mrs. Fabrizi shouted no, but with joy in her eyes, I could not refuse her. We went into living room, and where each piece of old furniture with wrinkled slip covers was, I turned, and there was new furniture, very ugly but to Mrs. Fabrizi beautiful. And she tried to kiss my hand.

Then we all went back to breakfast table, and now they had bright faces and hard eyes, and they licked their lips. They were thinking of themselves.

Dave said, "Mike, I'll lay it on the line. I need five hundred bucks to last out till the beginning of September. If you can do it with nickels—"

"There's no serial numbers on nickels," Frank said. "What do you want him to do, counterfeiting?"

I said, "I can do it." I got wallet, put one dollar bill on table. They watched me.

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Dave said, "I wouldn't ask, Mike, but I just don't know where else—"

I told him, "I believe you. Please don't tell me, I know it is truth." Now I could not stop. I reached and turned where instead of dollar bill, someone could have given me five dollar bill by mistake. Always this could happen, even if only one time out of thousand. Then I turned to where I could have changed this five dollar bill into one dollar bills, and so on table was five of them. And each one I again turned to a five, and then fives to ones, and so on, while they watched without breathing.

So in little while was on table one hundred five dollar bills, and Dave counted them with fingers that trembled, and put them in his pocket, and looked on me. I could see that he wished now he had asked for more, but he was ashamed to say it.

Then I said, "And for you, Frank, nothing?"

He looked on me and shook his head. He said, "You already done something for me," and put his arm around Anne's waist.

She said to him, "Pop—maybe about that stroke of yours?"

"No, now forget it, will you? That was a year ago."

"Well, but you might have another one sometime. But suppose Mike could fix you up—"

I was shaking my head. "Anne, some things I cannot do. How would I fix a weak heart? Could I take from somebody else the heart out of his body, and put inside Frank?"

She thought about it. "No, I guess not. But couldn't you kind of change it a little bit at a time, like you did to me?"

"No, it is not possible. If I was doctor, maybe, if I could cut open and reach in, to feel where is everything. And also if I would know all about what is wrong with heart. But I am not doctor. If I would try it, I would only make bad mistake."

She did not quite believe, but I told her, "To change skin is one thing, is like a game for little child with paper and scissors. But to change living heart, that is different thing altogether. It is like for mechanics, he must take engine from your car apart, and put back together, while it is still going."

Then I thought I saw what would happen. But was nothing I could do about it. So I waited, and in half hour Frank fell over table where was reaching for match, and rolled from table to floor. His face was turning purple, and eyes turned up under lids. He was not breathing.

Anne fell on her knees beside him, and looked up a me with white face. "Mike!"

Was nothing else to do. I

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reached, and turned; and Frank got to his feet red-faced, shouting, "God damn it, Anne, why don't you tack that carpet down?"

She looked up on him and tried to speak, but at first could not make words. Then she whispered, "Nothing wrong with the carpet."

"Well, I tripped over something. Almost broke my neck, too." Frank was looking around floor, but carpet was smooth and nothing to trip over. Then he saw she was crying, and said, "What the hell's the matter?"

"Nothing," she sad. "Oh, Mike."

So then I was bigger hero than before, but had a bad feeling, and not until after dinner, when we again drank too much whisky, could I laugh and talk like the rest. And I made for Frank two new suits in place of old ones, and for Anne and Mrs. Fabrizi all new dresses in their closets. Dave we did not see all day after breakfast.

In the morning I was again ashamed and feeling bad, but others happy and talking all together. When we were finishing meal, door banged open and in came Dave with another man, thin, with dark hair and skin like girl, and small mustache. He was carrying package under his arm.

"Put it down there," said Dave, with eyes bright. "Friends, now you're going to see something. This is Grant Hartley, the collector. Grant, this is Miss Curran, Mrs. Fabrizi, Mr. Curran, and this is Mike. Now."

Mr. Hartley was nodding, with cold smiles, "How do you do. How do you do." He took from watch chain a small knife, and began to cut open rope around package. It was sitting in middle of breakfast table, between toaster and jam jar, and rope went tick, tick when he cut it. And we all sat and watched.

Inside brown paper was cotton, and Mr. Hartley pulled it away in big pieces, and inside was little statue in gold. A dancer made of gold, with skirt flaring out wide and legs graceful.

"There!" said Dave. "What do think of that?"

When we did not answer, he leaned over table. "That's a Degas. It was cast in Eighteen Eighty-two from his wax model—"

"Eighteen Eighty-three," said Mr. Hartley, with small smile.

"All right, Eighteen-Eighty-three—cast in gold, and there was only one copy made. Grant owns it. Now this is the pitch. There's another collector who wants this statuette the worst way, and Grant has been turning him down for years. But it hit me yesterday, if Mike could make a copy, an exact copy—"

"This I want to see with my own eyes," said Mr. Hartley.

"Sure. So I put it up to Grant,

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and he agreed, if Mike will make *two* copies, he'll keep one, sell one to the other collector—and the third one is ours!"

Mr. Hartley rubbed his mustache, looking sleepy.

I said, "From this no good will come, Dave."

He looked surprised. "Why not?"

"First, it is dishonest—"

"Now wait, just a minute," said Mr. Hartley. "The way Sims represented it to me, this copy will be so exact, that no expert examination could ever tell the difference between them. In fact, what he told me was that one would be just as much the original as the other. Now then, if I sell one as the original, I fail to see where there's anything dishonest involved. Unless, of course, you can't do it?"

I said, "I can do it, but in second place, if I would make you something big and expensive like this, it would bring only trouble. Believe me, I have seen it so many times already—"

Dave said to Mr. Hartley in low voice, "Let me talk to him a minute." His face was pale, and eyes bright. He led me over in the corner and said, "Look, Mike, I didn't want to say this in front of him, but you can make *any* number of copies of that thing, can't you, even after Grant takes his and goes away? What I mean is, once it's been there, it's just like money in the bank —I mean you can draw on it any time."

I said, "Yes, this is true."

"I thought it was. I couldn't sleep all last night for thinking about it. Look, I don't want that copy because it's beautiful. I mean, it *is*, but what I want to do is melt it down. Mike, it'll keep us all, for years. I'm not selfish, I don't want it all for myself—"

I tried to say, "Dave, this way is too easy, believe me when I tell you."

But he was not listening. "Look, Mike, do you know what it's like to be an artist without money? I'm young, I could be turning out my best work now—"

"Please," I said, "Don't tell me, I believe you. So all right, I will do it."

He went back to table, and golden dancer was still standing there, but they had cleared away toaster and plates and it was alone. They were all looking on statue, and then on me, and no one spoke a word.

I sat down, and when Mr. Hartley was watching me with cold smile on his face, I reached and turned. And on table was two golden dancers, both the same. One turned partly away from other, facing Anne; and she looked on it as if she could not look away.

I saw Mr. Hartley jump, and

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put out his hand. But even before he could touch statue, I turned again, and on table was three.

Mr. Hartley pulled back his hand again like stung. He was very pale. Then he put out hand and picked up one of the statues, and then took another one. And holding both up and looking on them hard, he went away to the window. Then Dave picked up the third one and stood smiling and holding it close to his chest.

From window, Mr. Hartley said in loud voice, "By God, it's true!" He came back part way into room and said, "Have you got some newspaper—?"

Frank got up and handed him Sunday paper and sat down again, saying nothing. Mr. Hartley knelt down on floor and wrapped up first one statue, then other. His hands were shaking, and he did not do good job, but he finished quickly and stood up holding packages in his arms. "You've got the other one, that's all right," he said. "Goodbye." He went out walking quickly.

Dave had on his face a hard smile, and his eyes looking somewhere else, not here. He held statue away from his chest, and said, "Ten pounds anyhow, and gold is worth twenty dollars an ounce."

He was not talking to us, but I said, "Gold is nothing. If you want gold, is easier ways." And I reached in my pocket to where could be a gold coin, and turned, and threw coin on the table. Then I turned where it would hit different places, here, here, or there, and in a minute was little pile of coins shining on tablecloth.

Dave was watching like dizzy. He picked up some of the coins and looked on them, both sides, with eyes big, and then scooped up a handful. He counted them, stacked them, and finally after Frank and Anne also looked, he put them in his pocket. "Let me take these down to a jeweler," he said, and went out quick.

Frank sat back in chair and shook his head, After while he said, "This is getting to be too much for me. Who was that guy, anyhow?"

Anne said, "Mr. Hartley? He's just some art collector that—"

"No, no, not him, the other one. The one that just went out."

She looked on him. "Pop, that was Dave."

"All right, Dave who? I ask a simple question around here—"

"Dave *Sims*. Pop, what's the matter with you? We've known Dave for years."

"We have like hell." Frank stood up very red. I tried to say something, but he was too mad. "What am I, supposed to think I'm crazy or something? What are you pulling on me?" He made his hands in fists, and Anne was leaning away frightened. "I figured

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I'd keep my mouth shut a while, but— What the hell did you do with the carpet? Where's the picture of my old man that used to hang on that wall? What is this Dave business now, why is everything all different, what are you trying to do to me?"

She said, "Pop, there's nothing different—I don't know what you mean about—"

"Damn it, don't give me that, Katie!"

She was looking on him with mouth open and face very white. "What did you call me?"

"Katie! That's your name, isn't it?"

I put my face in hands, but I heard her whisper, "Pop, my name is Anne—"

I heard sound when he hit her. "I told you stop giving me that! I took about enough of this —wait till Jack gets home, I'll find out what you got rigged up here—I know damn well I can count on my own son, anyway—"

I looked and she was in chair crying. "I don't know what you're talking about! Who's Jack? What do you mean your son—?"

He leaned down and began to shake her. "Cut it out—I told you cut it out, didn't I, you bitch!"

I tried to get between them. "Please, is my fault, let me explain—"

Suddenly she screamed and got out of chair like a cat, and he could not stop her. She took hold of my coat and looking on me from few inches away, said, "You did it. You it, when he had the heart attack."

"Yes." On my face was tears.

"You changed him—you made him different. What did you do, what did you do?"

Frank came up saying, "What, what's this about a heart attack?"

I said, "Anne, he was dying. There was nothing I could do about it. So I turned where was another Frank, not same one, but almost like."

"You mean this isn't *Pop*?"

"No."

"Well, where is he?"

I said, "Anne, he died. He is dead."

She turned away, with hands on face, but Frank came and took hold of my shirt. "You mean you did something to me, like you done to her shoulder? Is that what this is all about?"

I nodded. "Here is not where you belong. Not same apartment, not even same family."

"What about my boy Jack?"

I said, hurting, "In this world, not born."

"Not born." He took harder hold of shirt. "Listen, you get me back there, understand?"

I said, "I can't do it. Too many worlds, I can never find same one again. Always I reach, I can find something. But it would be little different, just like here."

He was red, and eyes very

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yellow. He said, "Why, you lousy little—"

I twisted, and got away when he would hit me. He came after me around table, but stumbled over chair, and got to the door. "Come back here, you —" he shouted, and just as I opened door I saw him pick up the gold statue from table, and swing it in air. Inside me was a hurt jumping to be free, but I held it back.

Then I was out, and standing in hall was Mr. Hartley and two men about to ring bell. And one of them reached for me, but just then gold statue hit wall, and fell on floor. And while they looked on it, and one man began to pick it up, I went past and started down stairs, still holding back the thing inside me that was trying to get loose.

I heard shout, "Hey, wait! Don't let him get away!" So I ran faster.

Still they were coming down faster than me, and my heart was bumping like it would break out of chest, and on my forehead was cold sweat. My feet would not run good because I was so frightened, and I could not hold back the bad thing much longer, and so I reached in pocket where it could happen that I would have put pile of coins from table. And I turned, and took out handful of gold coins, and threw them on landing behind me. And first man stopped, other two ran into him, with swearing.

I went down rest of stairs weak in knees, and out to street, and I could not think, only to run.

Behind me came shouts and bangings. It was the two men, with heads down, running hard, and behind them Mr. Hartley. I saw they would catch me, and so I reached again in my pocket where I could have put statue, and I turned, but it was so heavy I almost fell down. But I took it out and threw it on street and kept running, and I heard them shouting back and forth to each other, to take it, not to take it, and so on. And I reached, and turned, and threw another statue on street. It made a sound like lead pipe falling.

Now from the sidewalk between cars came a man with his arms out, and I reached in pocket and threw at him some coins. I saw him stop, looking at coins hopping by his feet, and then I was past, running.

Next at corner where I turned there was three men standing by street sign, one with newspaper, and I heard shout, "Hey! Stop that guy!" When they began to move, I reached in pocket again, and to nearest man I handed statue. He took, in both hands, and I was around other ones and still running, but breath like cutting in my throat.

Then I looked back and saw them in street coming, like a fan of people—first a few, then be-

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hind them more, and more and more, all running together, and from both sides of street still others coming. I saw in their hands the gold statues, bright in sunlight, and their faces ugly. All this I saw like a picture, not moving, and it made me afraid like a big wave that stands up, and stands up behind you, and still does not fall.

Still it was really not stopped—all this was in an instant—and then I could again hear the noise of their footsteps and their voices like one big animal, and I was running but legs too weak to keep up with me. And I saw doorway, and I went across sidewalk in two big falling steps, and then in doorway I fell.

And across street came that wave of people, fast as a train. And I could not move.

Inside I was all fear, like a knot. I was crying, and sick, and I took from my pockets golden statues and I threw them out in front of me like a fence, two, six, eight — and then the wave burst over me.

Then I felt inside me a movement I could not stop—a reaching and turning. And all was quiet.

I opened my eyes. In front of me was no more people, no street. Under where I was lying in doorway was only big hole, very deep, so deep, I could not see bottom in shadow. I heard a noise of tires, and I saw a car stop sideways, just in time not to fall in. Then I looked up, and where should be other buildings across street, was ruins. Halfway down block, all the buildings had no fronts. Inside rooms the people were still sitting, with all their faces turned like pink dots, and still it was quiet. Then I heard some bricks fall with small hollow sounds; and then down in the hole, I heard noise of water rushing from a pipe.

I hold onto side of the doorway, not to fall; and then I began to hit my head against the side of doorway.

All those people who a minute ago were here, running, breathing, I had put them I could not tell where. Maybe falling through air, screaming — maybe drowning in deep ocean. Maybe burning in fire.

That child inside me had reached back to where was a world with ground lower down than this one—so when I turned it, a piece of the street went to that world, and only air, emptiness, came to this one.

After long time I lifted my head and looked on this destruction that I had made. A hole in street, buildings half gone, innocent people dead, no different than if I would have thrown a bomb.

All because I was frightened—because the frightened child inside me could not hold himself back when he felt in danger. So,

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now it was all over for me in this world.

Always the same, always the same, no matter how hard I tried . . .

Now I saw police cars pull up, and ambulance, and then fire truck close behind. Crowds were so thick that cars could hardly move. I saw a taxi stop at edge of the crowd, and I thought it was Anne and Frank that got out, but I could not tell for sure. It did not seem to matter. Now already they were far away and long ago.

I sat on my doorstep and I wished I should be dead. If it were not a sin, I would try to kill myself. But even then I know it would not work. Because that frightened child inside me would always turn to where it could not happen—where the bullet would not fire, or would miss, or rope break, or poison would be water.

Once only, for almost a year, I lived in a world where was no man. I lived in forest, and that world was beautiful, but always, when I would sleep, in my dream I would turn myself out of that world, and would wake up in world of men, and have to go back again to different forest.

Until at last I gave it up, and stayed in city afterward. Where I was going I did not know, but I knew that I must go. I was worst man in the creation, I was evil, but even for me I knew God had made a place.

I stood up, and dried my face on sleeve, and then took deep breath.

If I must wander, then, I said to myself, let me go far. I reached back deep, deep, farther than ever before—two thousand years. I found a place where one man was not born, and so all was different. And I turned.

The street disappeared. Up leaped a new city, of cold gray buildings climbing one behind another. All had peaked doors and windows, very big, and with domes of yellow stone, or powdery blue copper. Across the sky was airplane drifting—not cross-shaped, but round. The street was of cobblestones.

Because I had made one man not born two thousand years ago, here now, all world was different—all two thousand years of history different, all cities and all men living, different.

Here at least I would not make all old mistakes, here I could start new. And I thought to myself, *Now if I will only do one right thing, maybe it will wipe out all mistakes of before.*

I was standing inside a little park, with a railing of stone carved like loops of cloth. Behind me was a pedestal of stone, and two statues, one of a handsome young man in a hat with no brim, carrying a torch in his arms. And

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the other just the same, but with torch upside down. I remembered I had seen once in a book statues like these. It was a book about a god named Mithra of old times, and these statues that I now saw were statues of Mithra the morning star, and Mithra the evening star. They looked down on me with blank stone eyes.

Is it you? they seemed to say.

And I, looking back on them, said, *Is it here?*

But we could not answer one another; and I left them standing there, and went into the city.

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SCIENCE

F&SF's youthful Science Columnist, who recently celebrated his 20th year as a science fiction writer, here offers a fascinating rundown on large numbers, their history, uses, and eccentricities. And, consistent with F&SF's policy of service, all brought to you comfortably in advance of income tax day.

LOVE THOSE ZEROES

by Isaac Asimov

I HAVE A TENDENCY IN THESE, MY articles, to get absorbed in large numbers. This leads to proofreading troubles, printers errors, and arguments from the readers. I risk all that for only two reasons: 1) In these days of atoms and space-distances, "astronomical figures" are becoming common property and everyone is beginning to use them; and 2) I love large numbers for their own lovely sake.

Of course, handling large numbers has its dangers. You can get lost among the zeroes and starve to death. So I'd like to take this occasion to hack away at the underbrush and clear a path, both for the sake of your curiosity and of my future articles.

All cultures have the problem of large numbers, varying only in the size of the large number. Some primitives, faced with five cows, would cautiously state the number of cows to be "many." The ever-so-clever Greeks and Romans went further but had no special name for any number higher than a thousand. The Greeks had a word "myrios" meaning "many" which the later mathematicians made over into "myrioi" meaning "ten thousand" which, to be sure, goes one step higher. The word has come down to us as "myriad," meaning "very many."

One could, of course, make the term "thousand" do for everything higher. As one rose upward in multiples of ten one could have "ten thousand" and "hundred thousand" (as indeed we do) then continue on with "thousand thousand," "ten thousand thousand," "hundred thousand thousand,"

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"thousand thousand thousand" and so on ad infinitum.

Obviously clumsy.

After the crusades, when trade in Europe, and particularly in Italy, was beginning to flourish, merchants began to have occasion to think frequently in terms of thousand thousands. The Latin word for thousand was "mille," so some time in the 13th Century some nameless Italian decided on a slangy short cut for "thousand thousand" and called it "millione." The ending was intended to signify largeness, just as "balloon" is "large ball." In other words, "million" (which is the English version) means, so to speak, "king-size thousand."

It wasn't until the late 15th Century that "million" began to pass from trade into mathematics and even then it took another century before mathematicians could make up their mind that "million" meant "thousand thousand" rather than "thousand thousand thousand."

As you all know, the former won out.

Naturally, this sort of thing, once begun, is not easy to stop. Having invented "million" to do away with "thousand thousand," mankind was faced with the problem of what to do with "million million."

So, in the 15th Century, the word "billion" was invented in France. The "–illion" ending had already come to sound like big stuff. (It still does to youngsters who, having failed to learn to count to ten, are yet willing to bet a zillion skillion dollars.) As for the initial "b" in "billion," that is obviously part of the common Latin prefix "bi–" used to signify "two." After all, "billion" is the word "million" used twice.

This points the way for an indefinite extension of the system, an extension still used in England and Germany. Obviously a "million million million" is a "trillion"; a "million million million million" is a "quadrillion," and, in this way, we can build up, further, a "quintillion," "sextillion," "septillion," and so on. The prefixes in each case are Latin and signify, respectively, "three," "four," "five," "six," and "seven."

Since a million, in Arabic digits, is 1,000,000, you can see that each additional million in the name of the number, adds six zeroes. Consequently, to name a number according to the British-German system, just mark it off into groups of six, starting from the right.

For example, there are four sets of six zeroes in:

100/000000/000000/000000/000000

If we allow for the two zeroes left over to the left, the entire number becomes "one hundred quadrillion."

All this is nice, but it is not the system used in the United

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States. Apparently what first upset the perfect logic of this going by sixes was the impatience of the Dutch merchants of the 17th Century. They saw no purpose in having "billion" mean "million million." Since they practically never made a million million gulden or sold a million million tulips, they had no use for such a number. So they used "billion to signify "thousand million" a smaller number which they found more useful.

This kind of corner-cutting had consequences. Once "billion" came to mean "thousand million," then "trillion" obviously meant, "thousand thousand million," "quadrillion" meant "thousand thousand thousand million," and so on. According to this system, a number would have to be divided up (starting at the right) into first a set of six digits, then as many sets of three as it will hold. Thus our earlier number would be:

100/000/000/000/000/000/000/000000

Counting the number of complete sets (both six and three) gives us seven. The Latin prefix equivalent of seven is "sept," so the number is "one hundred septillion" by this new system. If you count zeroes, you will see it is the same as the "one hundred quadrillion" in the English-German system.

This Dutch innovation leaked back into France which adopted it. The French had already invented the term "milliard" to express "thousand million." Since the French suffix "—ard" implies "something to excess," "milliard" is the equivalent of "very king-size thousand." Anyway, the French kept "milliard" but accepted the Dutch system otherwise.

Shortly after the American Revolution, when all things English were unpopular in the United States and all things French were popular, the Americans accepted the French system in place of the English (but with "billion" instead of "milliard") and have kept it ever since.

(The question of the value of the billion enters nuclear physics in an odd way. At the University of California in Berkeley they have built a tremendous atom-smasher capable of accelerating particles to several billion electron volts ("billion" being 1,000,000,000). The abbreviation of "billion electron volts" is "Bev," so the instrument is called the "Bevatron."

(However, the British can't accept that, of course. A Bevatron is no Bevatron to them, nor is a Bev a Bev. When they wanted to speak of a Bev they had to call it 1000 Mev (Mev standing for "million electron volts"). To avoid the thousand, they coined the abbreviation "Gev," which is short for "giga electron volts," the "giga" possibly being a slang abbreviation of "gigantic." Anyway,

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NUMBER SYSTEMS (fine adjustment)

Number in digits	Number as Exponential	Name of Number	
		French-American system	English-German system
1	10^0	one	one
10	10^1	ten	ten
100	10^2	hundred	hundred
1,000	10^3	thousand	thousand
10,000	10^4	ten thousand	ten thousand
100,000	10^5	hundred thousand	hundred thousand
1,000,000	10^6	million	million
10,000,000	10^7	ten million	ten million
100,000,000	10^8	hundred million	hundred million
1,000,000,000	10^9	billion (milliard)	thousand million
10,000,000,000	10^{10}	ten billion	ten thousand million
100,000,000,000	10^{11}	hundred billion	hundred thousand million
1,000,000,000,000	10^{12}	trillion	billion

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NUMBER SYSTEMS (coarse adjustment)

Number as Exponential	Name of Number	
	French-American system	English-German system
10^{6}	million	million
10^{9}	billion (milliard)	
10^{12}	trillion	billion
10^{15}	quadrillion	
10^{18}	quintillion	trillion
10^{21}	sextillion	
10^{24}	septillion	quadrillion
10^{27}	octillion	
10^{30}	nonillion	quintillion
10^{33}	decillion	
10^{36}	undecillion	sextillion
10^{39}	duodecillion	
10^{42}	tredecillion	septillion
10^{45}	quattuordecillion	
10^{48}	quindecillion	octillion
10^{51}	sexdecillion	
10^{54}	septendecillion	nonillion
10^{57}	octodecillion	
10^{60}	novemdecillion	decillion
10^{63}	vigintillion	
10^{93}	trigintillion	

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one British Gev equals one American Bev. Remember that.

Of course, there is no reason why anyone has to follow this system all the way up. Billions have become familiar to all of us, thanks to the national budget. To science fiction readers, trillions have become familiar, if only because there are nearly six trillion miles in a light year. So why not break large numbers into the familiar billions and trillions? The number "one hundred septillion" (American system) can also be read "one hundred trillion trillion" or "one hundred million billion billion."

Scientists, who are the ones who most often have to use really large numbers, have, for the most part, abandoned the system of names altogether. Since our numbers are decimal in nature, each multiplication by 10 introduces a new zero. Thus, 10 is 10; 10 x 10 is 100; 10 x 10 x 10 is 1,000; 10 x 10 x 10 x 10 is 10,000; and so on.

The large number may then be written as simply the number of 10's it is necessary to multiply together. Thus, 10^3 is 10 x 10 x 10 or 1,000 and 10^6 is 10 x 10 x 10 x 10 x 10 x 10 or 1,000,000. Handily, the small number to the right and above the 10, the exponent, not only represents the number of 10's multipled, but also the number of zeroes in the final number.

Of course, though the exponential system is logical and precise, it lacks glamor. The Galaxy is 6×10^{17} miles wide but how much more resounding to say "six hundred quadrillion miles." There are 3×10^{25} water molecules in a quart of water but who can deny that "thirty septillion molecules" has more zing to it?

So with a sigh for the romance that lies dying under the heel of scientific nomenclature, I present two tables which summarize the sense of this article. Next time a kid offers to bet you a zillion dollars, raise him to a trigintillion. Not only will your word be a real number, but he will be jealous of you for having thought up such a beauty.

DUAL-CEREBRATION

Said the Martian: "Our privacy's done,
For invasion from Earth has begun,
But those guys must be far
Less advanced than we are—
Two heads are still better than one."

—NORMAN R. JAFFRAY

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The icy feet of a lonely, husky-voiced woman, the wyvern raids on a gentleman's pheasant house—such were the relatively simple problems faced by the night man at Bloom's. There was one persistent special problem, however, which was rather more complicated: survival each night till dawn. That required luck, pluck, and the skillful use of a red-hot poker.

Graveyard Shift

by Idris Seabright

IT WAS A BITTER-COLD BLUE NIGHT. The yellow glow that fell from the windows of Bloom's Sportsman's Emporium on to the snowdrifts only made them look colder. Leon Polk, who had come out of the Emporium in his shirt sleeves to see how the night was doing, found himself shivering violently. Colder than it had been, he thought, and going to be colder yet before morning. He looked at his watch. A little after one.

He went back inside. The Emporium boasted that it was open twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, and Leon had been the graveyard-shift clerk for more than six months. He hadn't minded the summer nights, but he hated the longer winter hours. If it weren't for being afraid of seeming to be afraid, he'd have asked to be transferred to the day or swing shift. Sometimes he wondered why he had volunteered for graveyard at all. But he hated being inadequate.

As he entered the big main salesroom, there was the usual nasty little scurry in the wall. Or was it coming from the floor this time? He rubbed his fingers together to warm them, and sniffed the air. No smell, anyhow.

The heat from the two Franklin stoves, one at either end of the salesroom, stung his frosty cheeks pleasantly. He noticed that the fire in the right-hand one was dying down a bit. He put a shovelful of coal on the flames and checked to make sure the heavy poker was lying with its end among the cherry-colored embers, the tip of its shaft heated red-hot. Yes. Good.

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He sighed, and went over to the checkerboard. Sometimes several nights in a row would pass without any customers coming in, and Leon was accustomed to beguile these times by playing checkers with himself, left hand against right. Perhaps he ought to take up chess; there wasn't much to checkers, after the first month. Or the trouble might be that he was too anxious, and couldn't put his full attention on the game.

He picked up one of the black men and started to jump it. He hesitated. Wasn't that the sound of a car stopping outside?

A moment later the bell over the shop door tinkled. A customer came in.

Leon's first thought was that she was a dazzlingly beautiful woman. His second was a little more critical. True, she was wearing a beautiful dark mink coat, and she smelled deliciously of some wonderful perfume. She was carefully made up. But her face, above the rich fur, was a little tired, a little old, and what he could see of her figure seemed at once too fat and too thin. Under the coat, he surmised, she would be spindle-shanked and heavy-breasted, knobby-kneed and with shoulders gnawed and eroded by the constant tug of shoulder straps.

"Have you," she asked in a husky, musky voice, "any ladies' long woolen underwear?"

"Yes'um," Leon answered. It wasn't quite what he had expected her to ask for, somehow. "What size?"

"Sixteen," she replied. "But I have a very small waist."

He went to the counter and got the long box out. "These are our ladies' skiing underwear," he said. "Extra warm. Made in two layers, with wool on the outside and soft fleeced cotton next the skin. If you have a sensitive skin. . . ."

"Oh, I have." She fingered the knitted stuff and gave Leon a look that almost made him dizzy. "They seem a little large in the waist."

"There's elastic in the waistband, ma'am. It ought to take care of that."

"I suppose so . . . Could I try them on?"

Leon hesitated. He knew perfectly well what the Department of Public Health of the state of Maine thought about customers trying on things that went next to the skin. But he didn't want to offend her, and . . . Another of those nasty little scurries in the wall behind his ear decided. If she tried on the underwear, she'd be here a little longer. He wouldn't be alone with the noises. "The dressing room's behind that curtain," he said.

"Thank you." She batted her eyelids up and down at him, picked up the armful of long-handled scarlet underwear, and

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went behind the curtain with it.

She must have been used to undressing quickly, for she came out from behind the curtain very promptly indeed. She wasn't wearing anything at all this time except the scarlet underwear and her high-heeled shoes.

She came toward him, using an elegant, bent-kneed hip-swaying walk. "Do you like the way they look?" she asked in her husky voice.

Leon stared at her, licking his lips. Her intentions were unmistakable. On the credit side, she smelled delicious, he was young, night is always an amorous time. And there was plenty of commodity, in the form of sleeping bags and pneumatic mattresses, in the Emporium. No wretched bumping on the floor. But her figure, accurately revealed in the scarlet skivvies, was pretty much what he had thought it would be. Besides, he didn't really think she liked him very much. She just wanted . . . Well, what did she want? Not, he thought apocalyptically, what she seemed to want.

It was time for a wild guess, a bow drawn at a venture, a jump in the dark.

"Are your feet always cold?" he asked.

She stopped short in her swaying approach. Her eyelids halted their mechanical pantomiming of seductive messages. Her jaw dropped a little. She gave him a direct, flabbergasted look. "Why—how did you know?" she said.

"Guessed. Your expression."

She sighed. "Well, you're a good guesser. They're like ice all winter long, and right up until the middle of May. It almost drives me crazy. The only time they get warm is when."

"I think I can fix that."

"You mean?"

"I mean really fix it. If you'll put your ordinary clothes on, ma'm, and your fur coat, I'll show you what I have in mind."

This time it took her a little longer, but when she came out from behind the curtain she was dressed for the street and wearing the mink. Leon led her over to the Ladies' Shoe Department.

He knelt before her, drew off her slipper, and measured her foot. Then, while she massaged that icy member and crooned endearments to it, he got out a pair of Bloom's Special spectator sport boots. He helped her put the right one on.

She shot him a disappointed look. "I've had fur-lined shoes before," she said. "They don't help."

"Wait," he told her. "This is something special. In a minute you'll see."

She waited. After a moment a slow smile spread over her face. "Why—it's warm."

"Un-hunh. You see, ma'am, it's battery-powered. There's a flashlight battery in the cuff of each

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boot. Two boxes of batteries will keep you warm all winter. Mr. Bloom, the owner of the Emporium, wears these boots himself when he goes to football games. He suffers from cold feet. I've seen him get an expression just like yours."

He put the other boot on her and she stood up, grinning. Now that her feet were warm, she looked no older than eighteen, and Leon felt a sudden pang at the thought of the bouncy surface of the $38.95 air mattress. Even the bumps in her figure seemed to have smoothed into sinuous curves. But the main thing was to please the customer, and that he had certainly done. Even Mr. Bloom would have been satisfied.

As she paid for the boots, the boxes of batteries and the red skiing underwear, she said, "You've been wonderful. I just don't know how to thank you."

"It wasn't anything," Leon answered. "Glad to have been of service, ma'm." He felt himself blushing.

She looked at him sharply. Then she smiled. "I'll be back," she said, "when the weather's warm. In May."

When she left, she took spring with her. Leon sighed. He poked up the fires, saw that the poker was hot—he might not need it, lots of nights passed without even a threat—and went back to his checker game.

About three the shop bell tinkled again. It was a beefy, ruddy-cheeked man with light hair, well wrapped up in overcoat and muffler. He had, Leon thought, been one of the linesman when he played football in college.

"I want a wyvern call," said the customer.

"I'm sorry, sir. We don't stock wyvern calls."

"You used to stock them," the customer said in an aggrieved voice. "They were kept down cellar."

Leon licked his lips. "We don't keep anything down cellar any more," he answered uneasily.

"Well, then, sell me some silver bullets. I suppose if I wait long enough the bastards will come out where I can shoot them, even without a call."

"I'm sorry, sir. Silver bullets have to be made up to order. It wil take about three days."

The customer cast his eyes up and addressed the ceiling. "This isn't the kind of service I've come to expect from Bloom's," he said. "I'm disappointed. Nobody that has wyverns can afford to wait three days."

"How are they bothering you?" Leon asked.

"They get into my pheasant house and kill my pheasant hens."

Leon considered. Killing hens wasn't quite what he would have expected from wyverns, those

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odd, snaky birds that hatch from basilisk eggs, but he supposed they could acquire a taste for pheasant blood. No doubt they got in through the hen-house windows.

"We don't really recommend silver bullets for wyverns anyhow," he said. "Rock-salt bullets are the stuff. And we have them already made up."

"Rock salt, eh?" said the customer. "I always heard that silver —But no doubt you know more about it than I do. Give me a couple of boxes of the rock-salt bullets."

"Yessir. The great thing, sir, is to aim for their tails. Remember that, sir. Aim for their tails."

"Oh, boy!" said the customer jubilantly as he took the wrapped-up parcel from Leon. "I can hardly wait to get home. I guess a dose of rock salt in the tail will take Mr. Wyvern down a peg or two. I never hated anything the way I do those wyverns. Damned insolent pests with their gleaming big green eyes."

He went out. Leon remained standing beside the cash register. Something in the customer's last remark bothered him, and he couldn't decide what it was. Wyverns . . . rock salt . . . gleaming big green eyes . . . There was something wrong.

Abruptly he realized what it was. Wyverns don't have green eyes.

He ran out of the Emporium shouting and waving, but it was already too late. The red gleam of the customer's tail light was receding down the highway. It was too far for Leon even to make out what his license number was.

Leon turned and walked back slowly into the shop. He'd muffed that one. He ought to have realized earlier that the customer was troubled with werewolves, not wyverns, and that he was suffering from the kind of linguistic confusion that had made the man in the story ask to be castrated when what he had really wanted was to be circumcised. There had been plenty of werewolf indications in what the customer had said.

Well. There was no use in crying over spilt milk. But it was awful to think of what would happen when the customer, lying in ambush beside his pheasant house, shot a hungry, irritable werewolf in the tail with a plug of rock salt. . . .

Well. Leon sighed and shook himself. He had troubles of his own to worry about.

He made up the fires again. He paused, sniffing. Didn't he, above the invigorating tang of the Maine pinewoods that came from the cartons of Bloom's Sportsman's Soap, catch a whiff of the peculiarly chilly foulness of . . . ?

Oh, he hoped not. He hoped he was imagining it.

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He picked up the checker pieces and put them away in their box. He glanced at his watch. Almost four, but the night was as dark as ever. He looked down and saw, lying across the floor, that odd shadow like a long, curling tress of auburn hair, that usually meant the cellar-dweller was going to come out.

The bell over the shop door rang.

This customer was a small, taut man who wore a leather jacket and had protected himself against the cold with earmuffs.

"Want first aid stuff," he said laconically.

"Yes, sir," Leon answered. His heart was pounding wildly with relief. "We have mercurochrome, bandaids, burn ointment, antiseptic ointment, snake bite outfits, and insect repellant. Any of those?"

The customer selected mercurochrome, bandaids and ointment. As he was paying for them, he said, "Could I bring Pedro and Vivian in here to patch them up? This stuff's for them, and the light is poor outside."

Leon remembered the shadow lying along the floor. He didn't want to be alone. "All right," he said. "Keep them tight on the lead, though, please."

"They're in a box."

"O.K., keep them in the box. How did they get hurt?"

"Rats," the man replied with a hard, bright grin.

He went out after the dogs. Leon frowned. The foul, cold smell was trickling out into the room like a pool of dark, heavy liquid. He hoped there wouldn't be trouble when the dogs noticed it. Terriers were aggressive dogs.

The customer came back with a small tin box. There were vents on the side. "Have you got two dogs in that?" Leon asked, surprised.

"Dogs? I didn't say I had dogs. These are ferrets. I use them for hunting rats."

He opened the box, and a lithe, dirty-yellow shape leaped out on to his arm. It was no more than fourteen inches long, but it seemed to exude ferocity. It had red eyes.

"Put it back in the box," Leon ordered sharply.

The customer moved, but before he could touch the ferret it had bounded from his arm and gone plunging across the floor, and the second ferret had leaped out after it.

The ferret man whistled; the animals ignored him. They ran in long blurred effortless arcs to the spot on the floor where the auburn shadow was.

Leon saw that the shadow on the floor had clotted together and gathered substance to itself. Now, as the ferrets reached it, it seemed to well out, to puff up into a great stringy mass, an exuberance of reddish, blackish hair.

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For a moment he stood paralyzed. The ferrets were uttering high-pitched snarling squeals and making snaky feints at the hair-mass with their heads. The mass was swelling, it was coming out, it was coming out . . .

Abruptly he came to himself. He had been waiting for this moment all night, perhaps for many nights. He ran to the stove and snatched up the poker. He wasn't afraid; but he felt a dim regret that the customer was going to find out what Bloom's cellar had kept concealed.

He thrust the poker, blessedly almost white-hot, into the mass.

There was a bubbling hiss. The ferrets were in a paroxysm of rage. For a moment Leon thought he saw two tiny blue points, like eyes, glowing in the thing's blackish heart. Then a long coil of hair, a spider-leg of hair, shot out at him.

Leon dodged adroitly. He knew that if one of the hairs touched his wrist, it would lay it open to the anguished bone. He thrust once more with the poker. This time the foul, cold, lonely smell rose up around him like an arching wave. It ate at his lungs and clutched at the warm beating of his heart.

His limbs felt heavy, his heartbeat slow and cold. But the tip of the poker was still a dull red. He lunged out for the last time with it.

The cellar-dweller had already received two scalding thrusts. While the ferrets snarled and raged, it drew back and then—perhaps only because the room was hot and it hated heat—it was gone. There was no shadow on the floor.

Leon stumbled over to the chair by the checker board and sank down in it. His head drooped forward on his breast. He let the poker fall to the floor.

The ferrets had gone loping back to their owner. While he talked to them soothingly and looked them over for new wounds, the air in the room grew clean again. The ferret-man dressed his animals' wounds and put them back in the tin box. There was a silence. At last he said, "I never saw anything like that."

"Unh," Leon answered.

"I mean—what *was* it?"

Leon shook his head. "I don't know. It's been here a long time, long before Bloom's was here. Before there was any white men in Maine. It's been here a lot of years."

"Is it—was it human?"

"Maybe it was once, two or three hundred years ago. Now it can go through walls and come up through the floor."

"But—you're alone with that thing all night? Every night?"

"Not every night," Leon felt constrained to answer. "I have

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one night off a week—another man comes in. But that thing is why Bloom's is open twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year. So there'll always be somebody on hand to cope with it. . . . I guess the ferrets stirred it up. It never came out when there was a customer here, before."

The ferret-owner shook his head. "Six nights a week alone with that! Buddy, you're a brave man."

Leon managed a wan smile. "I'm afraid of it."

The customer was still looking at him with admiration. "You're braver than you think," he said. "It would frighten God."

He picked up the tin case with Pedro and Vivian, and went out with it.

The sky was beginning to lighten a little. Leon looked around the big salesroom. Everything seemed normal. No scurrying, no smell. He thought he could risk a trip to the washroom.

He took a couple of aspirins and washed his face. When he came back, the sky was lighter still, and the air seemed less bitterly cold. No, not less cold, but there was in the grayness a hint that spring might be starting on its way. As the weather grew warmer, the cellar-dweller would estivate. But it was getting awfully bold.

At six-thirty, Bill, the first of the day shift clerks, came in. "What kind of a night did you have?" he asked. The day shift people knew there was something unpleasant connected with the night shift's work.

"Oh—pretty much like usual."

"Say—I hear old man Bloom's going to post the sheets this week for next year's shift assignments. Are you going to put in for graveyard again? I never heard of anybody putting in for graveyard more than one year."

Leon hesitated; Bill's eyes were on him. It was true, he'd never heard of anybody working graveyard for two years running, and the thing was getting awfully bold. . . . Let somebody else cope with it for a while. Nobody could possibly expect him to work graveyard year after year. And the thought of the thing made him feel sick.

He opened his mouth to tell Bill he thought he'd put in for days. What he actually heard himself saying was, "Oh, I guess I'll ask for graveyard again."

Bill looked at him in astonishment. "But—are you sure you can stand it?"

Leon licked his lips. He was nearly as surprised as Bill was. Why had he said that? From a not very creditable desire to see the same look on Bill's face that he had already seen on the face of the ferret-man? So he could show off how brave he was?

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No, that wasn't it. In a burst of insight, Leon realized that there is nothing more ultimately gratifying to the ego than to have a profound fear and not submit to being intimidated by it. It was for the sake of this feeling that he had asked for graveyard in the first place. It was a gratification worth another year of confronting the cellar-dweller every night.

"Yes, I think I can stand it," he told Bill. It was true; he felt a sort of sober self-confidence in his ability to deal with the thing, no matter how bold it got. He wasn't going to be too frightened to think of some way to cope with it.

He yawned, stretched, and put a little more coal on the fire.

Call Me Mister

There's a curious s.f. convention
  In the matter of names:
Whatever the features of alien creatures,
  Whatever their claims
To be thought of as human, the mention
  Of one of these folk
Means readers who savour each word and its flavour
  Are likely to choke
As they try to pronounce a collection
  Of consonants. Why
Give a thing with three arms and irrelevant charms,
  Like a periscope eye,
A monosyllabic inflection
  For a name? Let's—instead
Of these terrible grunts—have a tale, just for once,
  Of a life-form called Fred.

ANTHONY BRODE

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Joel Townsley Rogers is best known for his classic THE RED RIGHT HAND, *one of the great suspense novels. Mr. Rogers has a Woolrichian talent for driving, explosive story telling, and it is a very special pleasure to have him at last in F&SF. Go with him now, "beyond the farthest lost neutrino of any creation, the first or last stroke of any time . . ." and hold on tight. One last word: It's such a fast ride that you are likely to miss some of the scenery—this story is worth reading twice....*

No Matter Where You Go

by Joel Townsley Rogers

I SIGHTED THE BOUNDARY OF SPACE-time with Henley ten billion years from Earth. Rippled and black as volcanic glass, it loomed in front of us in a huge endless curving wall.

The ship flew against it like a windblown midge, swirled sidelong in the terrific vacuum torrents rushing around the inside surface of the sphere. In the dark blue void behind its spider-thread of contrail the white imploding outmost galaxies dropped away like slanting rain, vanishing far below.

We were beyond the farthest lost neutrino of any creation, the first or last stroke of any time. Yet for a moment as long as all the world, the wall seemed to remain equidistant, receding as we fled towards it, while I felt the ship emptied of all forward motion, like a child's toy rocket at the summit of its climb, on the sagging pinpoint of a stall.

It was Henley's added burden which held it back, of course. Like all true spacecraft, though limitless in range and of infinite speed, it was designed for solo flight alone. A nightmare of exhausting effort all the way with him, plowing desperately through yielding sand with a Sindbad's Old-Man-of-the-Sea wrapped around my shoulders. Climbing up a sheer glass cliff without a handhold, forever and forever, dragging his dead weight.

I didn't even want him with me in the other world. Yet I had taken off with him aboard, in my frantic haste to escape a police inquiry and possible imprisonment, and I couldn't just open the door now and request him

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to jump out. I must carry him through with me, or return to an Earth without Gipsy. To the empty little cottage on Wildwood Lane and the whimpering beagle pup and the motionless noon shadows of the backyard garden, and her bodiless footprints on the grass at the edge of the Black Pool.

No more of that! I blanked out all those backward images. Unrelentingly I bore down on the space-bar: stepped up our thrust by gamma-to-nu power.

"The sky seems to have clouded up suddenly, Brock," Henley said idiotically. "Looks as if we're going to have a storm."

He was half-crouched above his seat, looking out.

"Huge black wall, covering the whole sky!" he exclaimed spasmodically, with his face abruptly startled. "I never saw anything like it! It's coming at us like a tornado!"

"Hold on to everything," I told him. "We're going through."

That final thrust of power had done it. I glimpsed our reflection in the wall's dark obsidian concavity rushing headlong at us. We hit it in that instant.

The ship seemed to be whirled around upside down in a tunnel of soft rainbow fog. There were huge bright-colored bubbles floating all around us, imparting a feeling of no motion, though the rush of the stream was like a funneled hurricane. Then we were out beyond, in the other void, sprinkled with the red-dispersing galaxies of opposite space like farblown chimney sparks.

"What happened, Brock?" Henley said bewilderedly, sagging into his seat. "I felt as if my bones were being pulled clear inside out for a moment. Where in Thunder are we supposed to be now, anyway?"

All the traveling he had done had been one of the items about him which had impressed Gipsy. Rio, Durban, Bangkok, Delhi. Exotic names and far-off magic places to her—she had recited them to me in an entranced dream. But he'd never even been beyond Earth's gravity before. He was farther from home than he could in the slightest comprehend.

"In the other bowl of the hourglass," I told him.

He had made an apparently quick recovery and adjustment. His momentarily dissolved features were back in shape again. He was settled down at ease in his yacht chair, weatherbeaten gray suburban-squire weekend hat perched jauntily on his small white-haired head, plaid cashmere jacket, twenty dollar shirt, long flanneled legs crossed, highball glass in hand. Picture of a man of distinction. Millionaire corporation lawyer, stock market plunger, Ivy League university trustee, consultant to the State

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Department, yachtsman, big-game hunter, amateur psychologist and criminologist in his spare time. See his biography in *Who's Who.*

With his lean height and assured manner of money and success, any woman might find him attractive, I could understand—romantic, glamorous, spiritual, whatever word she used for it—if he were young. But he was a long way from being young. His skin was blotched and wrinkled; he had a corded forehead, artificial teeth, and little tufts of hair in his ears. All the unesthetic marks of life's gray creeping years, the caterpillar years which men as well as insects must endure, though in opposite order. And he would never be any younger in this world.

"The other bowl of the hourglass?" he said with a lifted brow. "What's that?"

"The other half of Infinity," I explained.

"Really?" he said blankly. "How extraordinary!"

He was such an ignorant fool. He didn't know backwards from forwards. He didn't know a thing.

"That depends on how you look at it," I said. "From this side, the real world may seem extraordinary. At least I hope the voyage isn't too much for you, at your age. You aren't so young as you were, you know."

He gave a perfunctory laugh, as if I'd made some joke he didn't quite understand. "Sometimes when my bursitis is bothering me I'm inclined to feel that I'll never climb Everest or run a mile under four," he said jocularly. "Don't be too concerned about my aged and infirm carcass, though, Brock. Just how much longer before you expect to find Mrs. Brock?"

"In less than no time at all," I told him.

"That's fine," he said, looking at his wristwatch. "For a moment I was afraid that you—"

He nodded a kind of half apology, as if taking back some of the things he'd said. He didn't completely believe me, though, even yet, I had the feeling. His faded eyes were examining the cabin again unobtrusively but minutely, I knew, as if he still halfway expected to find Gipsy hidden away somewhere inside with us, though there was no place she could be at all.

Still more than halfway suspecting me of having murdered her in a burst of crazy rage back there on Earth, ten billion years ago. Me, who had wanted only to live the rest of my life with her. Who could not bear to live without her, in the real world or this.

"The other half of the hourglass," he repeated. "Infinity! Do you mean—?"

I set the controls at minus zero-zero, dead center of the universe ahead. The ship had just fuel

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enough to make it. Past the point of no return. . . .

Henley had surprised me crouching on the ship's doorsill after my previous flight, straightening out the five foot plank to solid grass across the Black Pool.

"Mr. Brock?"

I held my breath, drifting my eyes around. It was my name, but I didn't know where it had come from. I hadn't thought there was anyone within a quarter mile, any nearer than the cretin Bibby swarm in their tarpaper shack down where Wildwood Lane petered out to swamp.

He was at the opening of the thick high hemlock hedge, at the end of the rear garden path. All that look of elegance and superiority, as if he owned the place, or didn't give a damn who owned it. He had a camera in his hands as if he had just shot a picture of me and the ship. A bunch of big scarlet roses with stems wrapped in a newspaper cornucopia was tucked beneath his arm.

I'd never seen him before, but I knew who he was, of course. Ralph A. Henley, who owned the big new summer place over on the other side of the village, looking out over the sound. He'd moved in two months ago. Millionaire bachelor, aristocratic, cultured, everything. Only a lot older-looking than Gipsy had described him.

"That's right," I said, standing up, brushing my hair down with my palm, knowing I was about six weeks overdue for a haircut, and wishing I'd shaved and put on a necktie this morning. "Excuse my appearance. I just returned from a long tough voyage, and probably look a little ragged. What can I do for you?"

"My name's Henley," he said, walking towards the edge of the Pool. "A friend of Mrs. Brock's. We've been commuting back and forth this summer on the same trains, I mean, and got acquainted. I just happened to be driving down this way, and thought I'd stop by to give her some new roses my gardener has developed. I've thought of naming them the Glorious Gipsy, as a matter a matter of fact, with her permission."

"She'd be quite flattered, I imagine," I said. "She's mentioned you to me. Your offices are in the same building in Rockefeller Center where she has her lobby magazine-stand, I believe. I understand you've been kind enough to take her out to lunch several times. I had an idea, in fact, that you've been picking her up in your car at the end of the lane to drive her to the station in the mornings, for the past couple of weeks, and bringing her back and letting her out there in the evenings. It's

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been thoughtful of you, and I appreciate it. She enjoys having her little job. She took it temporarily after we got married 'til I should finish my book and have more time to do things with her. It fills in the days for her and gives her a chance to meet all kinds of people. But of course the community is a little tiresome."

"I rather understand that she's had her job temporarily for twelve years or more, and that it's what supports you," he said pleasantly. "I imagine that it's a little more wearing on her than you seem to think. But perhaps we can find some time to discuss certain things. I'll just give her the roses, and be on my way."

"Watch out!" I said. "That stuff's bottomless!"

I hadn't expected him to try to come aboard without being invited. The plank was still a little askew. He hadn't bothered with it, though, giving a quick spring from the grass across the Pool before I knew it. He landed on the doorsill, bending his head a little to come in.

"Welcome aboard the rocket," I said ironically, a little indignant and frightened by his careless jump.

"The rocket?" he said with a condescending smile.

"The spaceship, to be technical," I said. "It's not really a rocket, of course. But that seems to be the popular word for any supra-terrestrial vehicle these days, whatever kind of propulsive power it has, and no matter how it's shaped. Pardon me if the cabin doesn't look too neat. I'm not used to having visitors."

"I'd forgotten you were a spaceman," he said. "Mrs. Brock told me. I remember now."

"If you'd only given me a couple of seconds, I'd have straightened out the plank and given you a hand up it, if you felt it necessary to come aboard," I said. "Do you know what that black stuff is you jumped over?"

"It looks like a rather gooey kind of mud," he said quizzically. "Bottomless, you said?"

"It may actually be only a few hundred feet deep," I said. "There's no way actually to plumb it. Still that's plenty deep enough if you had fallen into it. It's pure Infinitum, with zero gravity. You'd have sunk down in it quicker than a bullet, without a trace."

"Infinitum, really? I didn't know."

"That's what it is," I told him. "The pure unadulterated stuff. Probably the purest pool of it on Earth. Which means in the whole universe, since Earth is the only planet where it can be found at all, as you may know. I use it for fuel. Automatic tank underneath fills up while the ship hovers just a millionth of an inch above, as it's doing now. Nothing like it

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for speed and power, but it's got to be treated with respect."

"I suppose so," he said.

He had looked around the cabin, taking in my unmade bunk and big worm-eaten Elizabethan sea-chest with a brass hinge broken. At least my closet door was closed, crammed with old clothes and junk. He laid his camera and roses down on the end of my control table. The roses were full-blown, their petals spread out on yellow hearts. The newspaper around their stems was the Drama and Garden section of yesterday's Sunday *Times*, I saw. Maybe he had brought it for her to read. They were both interested in flowers and the latest Broadway plays, as well as art and music and travel.

"I'll give the roses to Mrs. Brock," I said. "It's lucky I dropped back to pick up her dog for her. Ten minutes more, and you might have found me and the ship gone again. Did you happen to see the pup around the kitchen door or garden as you were coming out here?"

"What kind of pup?" he said.

"A bench-legged little beagle named Bugle Boy. Tricolor, with one brown ear and one white, and a black saddle. About thirteen years old. Mrs. Brock's had him since before we were married. Some older man who was in love with her gave him to her. The dog's never liked me, and I'd not care too much if I never saw him again, but I was afraid that before long she'd begin to miss him on the other side."

"I didn't see him."

"Probably out chasing squirrels down in the woods back of the Bibbys'," I said. "He's become quite a wanderer lately. You can't teach an old dog new tricks, as the saying goes, and a young dog doesn't need to be taught any of the bad ones. If he isn't around, maybe I'll make a trip back for him some other time."

He wasn't interested in me or my problems, though, standing with his hands clasped behind his back, looking around the cabin. He seemed to be waiting for something.

"Modern piece?" he said, nodding at my sea-chest. "Novel idea. Made of wood with wormholes in it. I don't remember ever seeing anything like it before. What do you use it for?"

"I keep my space charts in it," I said. "It's a lot heavier than a steel or aluminum chest, of course, but it's sort of decorative. I picked it up in a London antique shop, on the other side. It's supposed to have belonged to Drake."

He looked pleased with himself for being ignorant, like a lot of rich big-shot men who went to Ivy League colleges and think that anything they never heard of isn't worth knowing about. Doesn't exist, in fact. He looked

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over the half dozen books on my shelf with his smile.

"*Outline of History, 6000 B. C.-1900 A. D.,*" he read the titles off. "*World Almanac, 1958. The Age of Dinosaurs. When the Moon Left the Earth.* I see you go in for the imaginative stuff, Brock. Who is Browning?"

"He wrote 'Rabbi Ben Ezra'," I said. "The poem that begins, 'Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be!' But I suppose he wouldn't make much sense to you."

"I'm afraid not," he said. "What a horrible thought! Who would ever want to grow old with anybody? The trouble with too many of these modern poets is that they take a delight in being incomprehensible. Why couldn't he have written it, 'Grow young along with me,' and given the world a pleasant thought? But I suppose that wouldn't be abstruse enough for literature."

He examined the printed placard I had thumbtacked on the wall beside the shelf.

"I see you you have a 'Litany of the Space Men'," he said. "'Question: What is hotter and brighter than the Sun? Answer: A billion billion suns! Question: What is swifter than light? Answer: Thought! Question: What is vaster than Eternity? Answer: It and its double!'—You know, that thing is rather intriguing, Brock. One hears it quoted all the time. I never met anybody who claimed he could make any sense out of it, but it's caught the fancy of the public, like some of these rock-and-roll songs. Do you know who originated it, anyway?"

"I did," I said. "I submitted it to a greeting-card publisher, and he gave me a free card in return for it. He's sold quite a few greeting-cards and office placards with it, I guess."

"He's probably sold a million, and netted about a hundred thousand dollars from it," Henley said. "It's obvious you're not much of a businessman, Brock. But you seem to have a flair for phrases. You ought to try getting yourself a job in something like advertising. Why not make the rounds of the big Madison Avenue agencies? That's where the money and success are to be found."

"I suppose so," I said. "But. . . ."

I let it dangle. He was thinking of Gipsy commuting five days a week to stand behind a counter selling cigarets and magazines, I suppose, for years without a break, to pay the rent and keep the pot boiling. I didn't like it myself. But I had been born a spaceman, and I couldn't be anything else to the end of the chapter, although I had tried at various times to land almost any kind of a job. It was written in my look, I suppose, for any practical and successful down-to-earth man to

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see, that I didn't really belong. He saw it himself, treating me as if I was a little off the beam.

He still seemed to be waiting for something. "Maybe you'd like a drink before you go?" I said, not knowing just how I was going to get rid of him.

"Thanks," he said. "You've heard the paraphrase of your litany, I suppose, in Harewood's current highly successful murder play, *Time Must End*, on Broadway?"

I got down on my elbows and knees to fish out my bottle of bourbon from under the bunk, back in against the wall.

"I haven't any soda," I said, standing up with it. "Do you want to swig it from the bottle straight, or have it with some water in a glass? No, I haven't heard it. I don't go in for plays."

"With water in a glass, if you have one," he said. "It's in the final scene, just before the curtain. The murdering husband has been caught. The detective asks him your first question, 'What is hotter and brighter than the Sun?' And he answers, with hanging head, 'Jealousy!' The detective asks him your second question, 'What is swifter than light?' And he answers, shriveling in his chair, 'The enraged blow!' The detective asks him your final question, 'What is vaster than Eternity?' And he answers, sobbing, 'Death!' It's an effective bit. If you'd only copyrighted your nonsensical little gem, you might be able to nick Harewood for a nice chunk for plagiarism."

"I'm not much on nicking anybody," I said. "No spaceman is. I guess we just don't live on this Earth enough to be interested in business and money.

"Here we are."

I opened the closet door and got out the thermos jug and plastic highball tumbler from the shelf above my hanging oilskins and windbreaker, while the garden tools and buckets and old boots and manuscripts and all the stuff that was piled waist-high on the floor spilled out around my feet. I poured out three or four fingers from the bottle, and added water from the jug. I pulled a pencil from my shirt pocket and gave a quick swizzle to the drink.

"I'd have one with you," I said, handing it to him, "but I've got to keep a clear head for my next trip. If the fool pup hasn't come home by the time the ship's fueled up again, I'm heading back for the other world to rejoin Mrs. Brock. I don't mean to rush you, though. Take time for your drink. You look as if you might need it. You don't look too well, as a matter of fact."

He had taken the highball in a numb wrinkled old hand. He stared at me, his lips trembling, his face like putty.

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"What have you done with Mrs. Brock?" he said.

"Done with her?"

"I assumed she was beyond that door," he said. "I assumed that it was the door to a washroom or small bedroom cubicle into which she had retired just before I entered, to wash her eyes out or give her time to compose herself. I have been waiting for her to appear. But I see it's only a tiny cupboard, without space even for your trash. Get your senses together, if you have any! Wipe that stupid look from your face! Stop talking like a babbling lunatic! I want to know what you've done with your wife, Brock, and I want to know now!"

"I took her with me on my last voyage and left her on the other side; I thought I'd already told you," I said. "What business is she of yours?"

"You haven't taken her anywhere, Brock!" he said. "You couldn't have! Less than five minutes ago I got out of my car in front of your house, and saw her going along your rear garden path in her yellow blouse and roman-striped skirt to the hemlock hedge around here. I came on back myself with the roses I had for her. At the break in the hedge I paused and got out my camera to snap a picture of her. She had taken a step up on the rickety narrow five-foot plank across the black ooze out there to the door here, in my finder. I snapped my picture and looked up, to see you squatting on the doorsill with your hand on the plank, and no sign of her. An interval of not more than five or ten seconds! That snapshot I made of her on the plank is developed by now. I will certainly show it to the police if necessary. Either that ooze is as quick and bottomless as you say, and you snatched the plank from under her, so that she fell into it and sank instantly before she could give a scream, or else she came on up and in through this door! Where is she? You can't have hidden her beneath the bunk. I watched you getting out your bottle, and she wasn't there. Against the wall back of the door?"

He seized the edge of the door and jerked it towards him. It swung around, shutting with a slam. But he could see she wasn't behind it. "This chest?" he said. He pulled open the ornate brass hasp of my sea-chest, and swung its lid up against the wall on its broken hinge. But he could see that it was all filled to overflowing with hundreds and thousands of charts of different galaxy-clusters on thin transparent paper, and nothing else. He let it drop again.

"Where!" he said. "What have you done to her, and where have you hidden her? With your wild-eyed unshaven look and your lunatic blather about Infinitum

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and space voyages and other worlds? Is there some hidden trapdoor in the floor, through which you've thrown her down into the black ooze beneath? You can produce her alive and unharmed within sixty seconds, Brock, or I'll take you into custody by citizen's arrest, and drag you to the state police barracks, and you'll tell what you've done with her, strapped to a lie-detector, beneath a bright light!"

I had collapsed into my chair at the control table with hands pressed to my face. If I could have done it any other way! If she were back here, to live on Earth with me the rest of our lives together. If I were half my present age, I twenty and she sixteen, if a thought of mine could wipe the intervening years away, how beautiful Earth might be.

But it couldn't be. Not now, when she'd met Henley. If she and I were younger by an age, he would be younger, too. He no longer withered, completely irresistible, full of vital charm. A younger Gipsy, even more impressionable, would fly into his embrace. It had to be the way I'd done it, and no other. But for a moment I wept dry tears for my lost youth, and hers.

"She told me yesterday that she wanted to leave me, Henley," I said behind my hands. "She made herself a drink, and came and sat on the floor beside me, leaning her head against my knee, while I was going over a chapter of my book. She's always been honest with me, she told me. She said that she was in love with you. That you were so tall and handsome, so cultured and poetic, so noble of soul. That's what she said. She didn't want to hurt me, she would always think kindly of me, but she felt that she had outgrown me, living in my own small world. Gipsy! Gipsy! My life and my love! I managed to stroke her hair and tell her it didn't matter, but I felt like a man dead, Henley. I thought it over all night long, and knew that I couldn't give her up. There was only one thing for me to do."

"Fifty! Forty-nine! Forty-eight!" Henley was counting down the seconds on his watch. "Forty-seven! Forty-six!"

"The ship was all fueled up," I said. "Enough for a voyage clear around the figure-8 and back. I asked her this morning if she could come out to it at noon, that I wanted to show her something. She came up the plank and into the ship, Henley. I—"

"Thirty-three! Thirty-two!" he counted down.

"I asked her to sit down in that yacht-chair there," I said. "I took off with her. To the space-time wall, ten billion light years away, and through it. She never knew that anything had hap-

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pened to her. She's all right, Henley. Over on the other side nobody ever knows it's not the real world, that's the beautiful part of it. They just forget, and go on living in their minus way, as if it was ordinary. Only I'd forgotten her dog, and came back for him—"

"Seventeen! Sixteen! Fifteen!" Henley was counting down. "Not a lot of seconds left to show me where she is, Brock, or be hauled down to have it sweated out of you!"

He would have done it, too. Crazy old guy, but rich and powerful. No telling how far he'd carry it. He might get me thrown into a padded cell, committed for the rest of my life. He might have my ship broken up and a match tossed into the Black Pool that would consume every atom of its priceless Infinitum as quick as thought, and the empty hole filled up with rocks. I'd never be able to get off the Earth again, nor even out of the barred windows of my cell.

"Sit down," I said. "I'll take you to her, Henley."

He had closed the door already. I didn't know whether he had knocked the plank off into the Black Pool, or whether it was still leaning against the edge of the sill outside, and I'd have to leave it tilted in emptiness. No time to think of anything on the Earth at all, nor ever again. I hadn't taken in enough fuel for a round trip yet, and this must be the end. I bore down on the space-bar, and gave it the gun with a thrust of gamma-to-nu power. We took off at infinite speed.

"Looks like a storm," Hanley said, looking out the window as he sat down with his drink, his eyes lifted from his watch. "Huge black wall, coming at us like a tornado!"

But we were through then, with that final thrust.

"What happened, Brock? I felt as if my bones had been pulled clear inside out for an instant! My watch seems to have stopped. Where are we supposed to be now, anyway? The other bowl of the hourglass? The other half of . . ."

I saw something white stirring in the heavy-petaled roses that Henley had laid on the table end. A common white cabbage butterfly, stowed away, fanning its lazy wings. Three living things of us that had made the jump, not two.

Carefree insect, en route through Infinity! For the instant, with a dry grief, I envied it. It didn't need to contemplate, ever again, its dull crawling caterpillarhood, the dark cocoon and winter rains. All that behind it now, all the ugly wormlike half of its existence, and ahead of it only joy on gauzy wings in bright forever summer

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skies upon Earth, until its gay life should end in one last exultant sunward swoop and downward flutter, without its knowing. Far luckier than the roses it nestled among, beautiful and full-blown but now aready past their prime, which had lost their hour of being young and perfect buds in Gipsy's bedroom flower-bowl or in her hair, with only a browning and a withering for them soon, a shedding of their petals, and dead stems.

For Henley and me also. Even Gipsy. The withered time ahead, no more the buds, no more the dream of wings. Youth lost, and lost forever. Only the white butterfly didn't care. What is one's gain can only be another's loss, I thought. In both Eternities.

I was sorry I hadn't been able to bring Bugle Boy. She would miss him, certainly, and he would be desolate without her. When he returned from his roaming, he would whine and scratch and yelp at the kitchen door for her. Not answered, not let in, he would sit, sensing the emptiness of the house, with cocked head and wrinkled hound's brow. He would begin presently, perhaps, to cast around in circles for her scent, following her last trail along the garden flagstone between the irises to the hemlock hedge, and through it across the grass to the edge of the Black Pool, stretching empty and rippleless and intangible before him, with the spoor ended, no sign of her, not understanding in his dog brain where she had gone.

Whining back and forth between the house and the Pool. For days and weeks, it might be, while his shadow grew smaller, and his voice high and thin. Until he tottered, sprawling on unsteady legs, his vision confused and dim, all memory of his devotion to her gone, his brain holding only old inherited instincts of his kind. Until his mother came for him, the great shadowy snuffing presence, the nuzzling teat, the dark womb which is the end of all. And so no more of his life and the dream.

And then quite suddenly I knew that Bugle Boy was here in the cabin. He had come bouncing up the plank while Hanley was talking with me about my books and my Litany on the wall, following Gipsy's scent, and had crept away to hide under the bunk when he hadn't found her. I had brushed his nose with my fingertips when I was fishing around under the bunk for the bottle. I just hadn't been thinking of him.

That was a small relief. At least my trip back to Earth hadn't been completely wasted, even if it had compelled me to bring Henley along now on my return.

"The other half of Infinity?" Henley said, hoisting his drink

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reflectively, with his forehead wrinkled. "The Figure-8 you mentioned? I know the mathematical symbol for infinity, of course. It must have been what you were referring to, I realize when I think of it. Something like a Figure-8 lying on its side, or like an hourglass, I suppose. Two spheres linked together. But it's just an arbitrary sign, not a picture of the actual shape of anything, according to what I learned in college. I thought, in fact, that the Universe was supposed to be a closed sphere, if it had any limits. What do you have in mind, really, with your doubletalk?"

"A double sphere," I explained a little tiredly. "Plus and minus. Positive and negative. Imploding and exploding. Pro and anti. Obverse and reverse. Did you ever hear of a to without a fro, or a tick without a tock? It's so simple that I should think even a child would know it without being told! When you think of it at all, you can't help seeing that it has to be, or else everything would collapse instantly into a pinpoint, or fly endlessly apart."

"I see your idea," said Hanley. "But how—?"

"When you reach the limit of whichever sphere you're in, if you've got the power to keep on going you go through into the other part," I said. "That's all there is to it. I've made the trip ten thousand times myself. Sometimes it seems to me I've lived more of my life in this universe than the real one. Don't worry your head about it. Everything is just the same in it, but turned around. You'll feel at home the moment we have landed."

We had passed a hundred million far-off galaxies like gale-blown dying sparks. We were approaching the dead center of all of minus space. Ahead in the blue-black void I saw the dim pinpoint of light appear, which I had set the automatic pilot on.

It came towards us, bursting like a Fourth-of-July rocket into a Christmas tree of stars. It spread outward into a spiral galaxy of ten million star-clusters, each one ten thousand suns.

The tides of space broke on its outer reefs from a million years away. Then instantly it covered the whole sky, jeweled clouds above and below like blazing diamond brooches, separated by parsecs and ten thousand years, at the center a great dark core shaped like a woman lying supine with bent legs and head pillowed on her hair.

"What on Earth are all those stars?" Henley said in an awed whisper.

"The Mirror Galaxy," I said.

"The Mirror Galaxy?"

"That's what I call it, anyway," I said. "It's the mirror of the real Milky Way, which has a dark core shaped like that. The same

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groups and constellations, only in reverse. We're in the mirror now of our own Sun's local group, our own visible sky. You'll recognize some of them as they shoot by."

I had eased over a fraction, heading the ship down at a slant towards the flat pancake-shaped cluster lying outward on the galaxy's left. The rest of it lay spread out far behind us like a plume.

"Why, yes, I rather see what you mean, Brock!" Henley said, leaning forward to look out. "That monstrous whopping sun might be Betelgeuse! And Rigel, Epsilon — it's Orion, only backwards, from what I remember of my astronomy!"

He looked older and weaker, bent forward, almost shriveled. The incredulous little smile at the corners of his mouth had flattened out.

"Cassiopeia upside down," he said, "on the wrong side of Polaris! The whole Dipper turned around! And those look like— Beta and Alpha Centauri—yes, a reverse image of Centaurus, rushing past us on the right! Why, Alpha is the nearest neighbor of the Sun! Only four or five light-years off. That must mean that the smaller star ahead of us is—"

"That's right," I said. "The mirror Sun ahead. We're in the mirror Solar System now, with all the mirror planets."

"Fantastic!" Henley said. "I never would have believed it! Neptune! Jupiter! But rotating counterclockwise! Why, that planet we're heading for is Earth! Only with the continents turned around! East for west, and the North Pole for the South! And turning backwards on its axis! We're as near to it as the Moon! We'll hit it in half a second!"

Just above the blue atmospheric envelope of the mirror Earth I cut the power and leveled off, coasting at only a couple of hundredths of C, to give Henley a look at it, which he had never had before. Not much more than a thousand miles up, no higher than a sputnik, and at a speed not more than a thousand times as fast, we drifted around the reversed planet for a good six seconds, dawn, morning, afternoon, and sunset, night and dawn again, while it turned on its axis a fortieth of a degree.

"Incredible!" said Henley. "Florida for California, and Japan where the British Isles should be!"

"That's the way things are in this world," I said. "Time and space both minus, negative, reverse. Mirror London is where I picked up my Drake sea-chest. Browning lived there, who wrote that poem about 'Grow old along with me!' To everybody who lives on this earth, all the future is in the past, and all the past is in the future. What is old to us is the

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latest thing to them, and what's new and modern to us they call antiques. I suppose you could say that they live their lives backward, like insects."

"Like insects?"

"That's just a kind of comparison," I said. "I don't mean that they look or feel or think like insects. They look and seem just as human as everybody on the real Earth. But you know how insects begin their lives having wings, and end up caterpillars, while men and women start out being old and gray and crawling, and keep getting younger and more beautiful and gay. Well, in this world insects start out as caterpillars and end up butterflies, while men and women and dogs and cats start out being young, and get older. They keep on getting older until they die."

"What a horrible kind of life!" Henley said, looking old and shriveled in his chair.

He downed his highball with a shudder.

"Kind of horrible when you think about it," I said. "But it's what they're used to, and most of them don't have an idea there is a real world where things are different. And as soon as we land, you'll forget, yourself."

The ship was right above the reverse mirror image of New York City, reverse Long Island Sound, reverse Oldport, Connecticut, reverse Wildwood Lane, reverse mirror image of Gipsy's and my little shingle house, the back garden with the path down through it, the tall thick hemlock hedge around the grass plot around the Black Pool, smooth and empty-looking. I hit the zero key, and we settled instantly on the mirror of the Pool, though it wasn't a pool of bottomless Infinitum on this earth, of course, but only skin-thin mud.

Henley stood up a little unsteadily.

"Your bourbon has some authority, I'll grant you, Brock," he said, picking up his bunch of fading roses and his camera from the end of the control table beside my machine. "What were those three or four keys you just hit on your typewriter? 'G, G to N power'. And a couple of spaces, and a zero. I thought maybe you were writing 'A quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog' or 'Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party.' But no time for that in half a second, even at the speed you click. You might at least have spelled out one short coherent word, though, like 'hell' or 'damn'. All right, let's have no more stalling! Where is Mrs. Brock?"

He reeled after me as I pulled the door open. Outside in the bright noon mirror sunlight, Gipsy stood in the opening of the

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hemlock hedge at the beginning of the path through the rear garden, paused on one foot and looking back, in her striped skirt and yellow blouse, with her red lips and black windblown hair, her gold earrings dangling. Only the hedge opening and garden path were to the left, not right.

"Aren't you coming, my poor bewildered Homer?" she said with gentle sympathy. "Lunch is ready. I thought you understood. What happened to the plank? Good heavens, you can jump that far, certainly! Only about four feet. I never knew such a helpless and inadequate man!

"Bugle Boy!" she exclaimed, crouching on her thighs, as the pup jumped from the sill behind me, sprawling off into the skin-deep mud, then leaping past me across the grass to her. "Were you in there? I didn't have an idea you'd followed me! Stop slobbering and waggling your tail off as if you hadn't seen me for twenty billion years, more or less! Down with your muddy paws! After all the years I've spent trying to train you, ever since you were an old, old dog—What was I thinking of?" she laughed, rubbing him behind the ears. "What a silly way to talk to you, you funny little mutt! You're just a little puppy still, and we both know it. But someway I feel as if I'd had you a long time. Do you feel the same way about it?"

She looked up. Her face changed as she arose to her feet. It grew softly more beautiful. I had never seen her so beautiful and so young. Nor would I see her so young again as in this instant, for the backward Sun must turn, and the backward days and years must grow. Though always, in my memory, beautiful.

"Why, Ralph!" she exclaimed, her eyes like dark radiant stars beyond me. "However could you have come from Homer's little shack? I just came from it myself! He lured me down to it by telling me there was something he wanted to show me, but it was only that senseless 'Spacemen's Litany' about what is quicker than light and vaster than Eternity, and so on, which I've heard him recite at table, and sing in the shower, and mumble in his sleep, about ten thousand times, so I turned on my heels and left. We couldn't both have been there together! How did we pass? Will miracles never cease! Did you come to talk about us to poor Homer? It's all right. I talked to him myself last night. He understands."

Henley was extending his cornucopia of roses to her as awkwardly and shyly as a boy.

"Some new ones," he said. "I'd like to name them the Glorious Gipsy, if you'd not mind. They're beautiful full-blown this way, and even more beautiful in bud. But

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they're just a little faded, aren't they? I should have cut them fresher. Younger. In bud. I don't know what possessed me. I suppose I was a little confused at the thought of seeing you, and had some idiotic idea that they would grow into buds—I know I sound crazy. But you're the first. I'm not so very young— I mean not so very old. What I mean is you're the first, the very, very first, and I love you, Gipsy!"

"They're lovely, anyway, Ralph," she said. "And wrapped in the Drama and Garden section of tomorrow's Sunday *Times!* I'm sure nobody else but you could have got it so soon. It's generally not on sale till evening. But you can do anything. The way you can get all the theater tickets impossible to obtain, tables in all the best restaurants, reservations on all the boats and planes. When we are married, traveling everywhere, seeing all kinds of strange far-off magic places—Oh, Ralph!"

I could have been ten billion miles away and still ten billion more, back on Earth, for all they knew or cared.

"He's *old!*" I cried with breaking heart. "He's fifty-six years old, and he'll never be any younger in this world! We'll never have our own youth, Gipsy, but he won't ever be even as young as we are now! I'm only forty still in this world, and you're only thirty-six! There can be good years ahead for both of us together! But he's old already! You've got to realize what that means! Time moves backwards here! He's old, and he'll be getting older, older, older all the time!"

But she didn't care. She didn't even hear me. She had forgotten. Most people on this false mirror Earth have forgotten. Only I would weep for her and my lost youth, which we would never have.

The ship is getting pretty dilapidated now. It looks about like any small pine-board one-room shack such as artists or writers or inventors build in their backyards to be alone. Some of the roof shingles are off, and there's a rotted place in the floor. But if it only had the fuel, it could still fly at infinite speed to any place in either bowl of the hourglass or beyond. I'm spending all my time looking for a tankload of Infinitum now. It wouldn't have to be a whole bottomless pool. Even a gallon would do. Old man Miror-Jack Bibby down in his tarpaper shack claims that you don't need Infinitum, that he can fly as far as anybody just with a jug of sour mash. But he's not right in the head, somewhere.

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A former assistant district attorney in New York County and presently a practicing lawyer, Eleazar Lipsky has somehow found time to write such successful books as THE KISS OF DEATH, THE PEOPLE AGAINST O'HARA, LINCOLN MCKEEVER *(a 1953 Literary Guild Selection),* THE SCIENTISTS, *(a full-bodied novel of modern science which is this February's Book-of-the-Month Club selection)... and the following account of a shabby shyster who (ridiculously?) becomes a hero out of his own time.*

Snitkin's Law

by Eleazar Lipsky

LESTER SNITKIN WAS ABOUT TO step into the Criminal Courts Building in New York, when suddenly the revolving door stuck and he was shimmered (there is no better word) into the Unimaginable Future. Snitkin was a lawyer; he was also small, bald, shabby, furtive, unsuccessful, untrustworthy and ugly. There was no conceivable reason why this should have happened to him.

"Who?" Snitkin protested. "What?"

The Time Machine ended its functions, having exhausted its reservoir of high energy antichronon particles, or whatever it was that made it work. In less desperate exigencies, Snitkin might have been thrown back into the sea of Past Time, but since he was the only fish in the Time Net, he was dusted off by men in white jackets, and hustled up to the Institute of Advanced Studies on the rubble of the United Nations.

"I don't get all this," complained Snitkin. "I am entitled to an explanation." He had not long to wait.

In the Unimaginable Future (he was told), cybernetics had reached the point where stagnation and utter futility had set in. Commerce had come to a halt, the birth rate had droped to zero, the climate was changing. The best minds—human minds, that is—had convened in what was left of the world's capital and had

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concluded that the decline of civilization was due to the central machine of all—the Justice Machine.

The difficulty was that the Justice Machine, a vast pulsating structure housed in what was left of the Criminal Courts Building, and linked in cunning relays and booster devices to sub-assemblies scattered about the country, was designed to dispense justice to all—even-handed, inexorable, perfect justice. And that was horror beyond description!

Automation had reached the point where twice monthly by legal fiat—fiat prescribed by the machine itself—each citizen was scanned by Theta-scanners (too complex to explain), carefully identified, and examined hypnotically under drugs for errors, mistakes, wilful transgressions, sins of omission and commission, misdemeanors and evil thoughts aaginst the Justice Machine.

All conceivable codes, measures and penalties were retained on tape by infallible memory banks. Penalties were swift, sure and dreadful. From the populace rose loud wails of woe and cries for succour. That was where Snitkin came in—snatched from the past to save the future.

Snitkin listened carefully, and then spoke. "Gentlemen, I don't see the problem," he observed in adenoidal accents which the Unimaginable Future found piquant and charming—adenoids having been abolished. "You've still got a Constitution of the United States? You've still got a Fifth Amendment that protects?"

He was told what had happened to those noble documents. His face turned a greenish, dirty color, which was his equivalent of pallor, and he whispered, "Not even a copy left? Not even in the law libraries?"

He was told what had happened to those adjuncts of the legal profession — a profession made obsolete by science.

"Well, gentlemen," said Snitkin finally, quoting an ancient text, "the legal mind is equal to the exigencies of the occasion. Where is this so-called Justice Machine?"

He was returned to the place from whence he came. Things had not changed much at the Criminal Courts Building, except that dirty bits of straw littered the granite courtyard and pigs and cattle grunted and wallowed. A side entrance was still relatively clear. Not so deep as a well, nor as wide as a churchyard, but enough to get into the ancient ruin.

Snitkin paused, overcome with emotion, and gazed about the Hall where once an Information Booth had stood. Remains of a Press Room, a Lunch Bar, Telephone Booths, and Psychiatric Clinic were marked by bronze

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tablets erected by an Historical Society of Antiquarians. When he recovered, he called for a judicial robe—one was hastily improvised from black cloth—and impressively affixed a pince-nez which had come with him on a black ribbon.

"Gentlemen, it's perfectly clear," he said learnedly. "Transparently clear. Things are in a state of hopeless confusion. Do the ends justify the means? Who takes care of this device?"

A trembling man with oily hands and a thin neck was shoved forward. His name was Gus and he was the Keeper of the Justice Machine. It was an hereditary civil service sinecure handed down through the generations from father to son. Gus admitted that he held the key to the cellar.

"You go ahead, Gus," said Snitkin sternly. "I'll follow."

Hours later Snitkin emerged, panting, streaked with grease and dust, but smug and satisfied.

"Gentlemen," he announced oracularly, "we can go about our business. I have invoked an ancient legal remedy which comes down from our earliest Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence. Long before the Constitution, before Magna Carta, even before the Institutes of Justinian, there were machines. Yes, and in those days, the recourse of individual man against the machine was simple."

Snitkin coughed and gazed at the ranks gathered in mute appeal. Almost, in imagination, he was addressing a jury of his client's peers, only now his client was All Humanity. "Gentlemen, you are in misery! Why? Because you have been getting perfect, machine-made justice, gentlemen. And the truth is that the average human being does not want perfect justice! He wants something else—eats, love, a hot daily double—but it is not in human nature to want justice! Do I make myself clear?"

Snitkin called for a glass of water. "Gentlemen, what to do? The answer is simple enough to the legal mind. I have with the help of my, ah, colleague and friend, Gus, introduced into this monster a gadget which provides what we might call a random or luck factor—a do-hickey, a dingus, a zinger. Gus calls it a loose vibrator on an eccentric cam, but what the hell? From now on, I don't know what you'll get, but one thing I guarantee: you won't get perfect justice! Gentlemen, the answer to the machine is to fix the machine. I use that word in its strictest sense. *You fix the machine!*"

In the deathly silence, Snitkin raised a restraining hand and stood on tiptoes to give the illusion of height. "Now, my dear friends, we can go about our business, happy in the knowledge that we

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have restored a forgotten way of life. Over these halls I would like to see the motto: Round and round the little ball goes—and where she falls nobody knows! And, oh, yes—"

But already a patter of applause was rising, a shuffling of relief.

"Oh, yes," said Snitkin loudly, "and I would remind you that I intend to open my offices across the street where in a past millenium I once practised law. I am not a learned man, but I can say without fear of contradiction that I am the only living man who still knows how to put in the fix. Where do I send my bill?"

This then is the story of Snitkin. To the end of a long, useful, honored, happy life, he kept a busy office. Presidents of bar associations delivered eulogies, district leaders followed the coffin to the grave. He died a rich man.

Gus died even richer.*

THE END

**Historical Note:* It is only now that the theory of the Justice Machine has been satisfactorily established. According to the Theory of Improbability, all moral qualities can be suitably quantified under the so-called Lenin-Stalin-Khrushchev Transformation Equations. By these fruitful formulations, it was discovered early in the twentieth century that everything can be taken to mean anything else provided that the number field be restricted to the transcendentals.

When the original circuits of the Justice Machine were wired, the principle followed was: Liberty and Justice for All. This principle can be represented as follows:

$$L + J = 1$$

where L = Liberty; J = Justice; and 1 = All.

It is evident that as J increases in value, L will decrease. In simple terms, the more Justice, the less Liberty. This is almost a truism.

Following Snitkin, the instructions were re-examined carefully in the light of an ancient forgotten principle that a thinking machine is only as smart as its input of instructions. The formula was modified to:

$$\frac{J}{L} = 1$$

Or:

$$J = 1\ (L)$$

From which it follows, the more Justice, the *more* Liberty. This has come to be known as "Snitkin's Law."

Snitkin's Law was put into effect everywhere, except in Saudi Arabia, where the technique of lopping hands for theft seems to get results as satisfactory as methods used in more advanced jurisdictions. This too follows from the Lenin-Stalin-Khrushchev Equations.

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A short novelet, investigating the love life of a strong-minded woman who, while feeling that marriage had its weakest point in the animal nature of the male, also felt that the animal nature of a ghost could be most satisfactory indeed!

DEATH CANNOT WITHER

by Judith Merril

EDNA COLBY AWOKE AN HOUR after dawn, and after no more than three hours' fitful sleep. In peignoir and mules she groped to the window, and looked out at her Dutchess County farm—hers and Jack's, she reminded herself dutifully — at orchard and field touched by a winter morning's first light. Just barely winter by the calendar, but winter . . . and Jack's bed, beside her own, was still as smooth, as empty, as when she'd made it up the day before.

Separated by an authentic hand-tied rag rug and an Early American maple night-table, the two beds were gray in the light. She stared out the window at the apple trees, at the twisted, barren-bare trunks, and whispered, "Like my own heart." She repeated the phrase, tasting each syllable, listening to the sound of a woman bereft. Then she went downstairs, a pink ribbon adding a wistful note to her handsomely cut hair.

She stood before the gleaming stove in the kitchen, making coffee, her eyes unseeing on the golden knotty-pine panelling of the walls. She was thinking over how to phrase her excuses to the farm help when they came to get Jack's instructions for the day. The coffee boiled over before she could decide on the proper wording. She pinched her lips and wiped the stove.

"He might at least have called," she whispered sharply. "The other times, he's at least tried to cover up." She realized suddenly that each of those only suspected other times had this morning become a certainty too long ignored. "I'm losing him," she thought with great intensity; then, in jealous anger: "I've lost him!" And then, finally, in purest rage, she cried out: "*No!*"

The kitchen door slammed loudly. "Coffee!" Jack's hearty voice cried out on a wave of cold sharp air. "Baby, that smells *good!*"

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Before she could react, Jack had crossed the room, embraced her warmly from one side—avoiding the coffee pot in her other hand — and murmured fondly: "Happy anniversary, sweetheart!"

It was, indeed, eight years to the day since the cocktail party. The before-Christmas cocktail party at which Edna Arkwright, Assistant Buyer in Ladies' Wear, had met Jack Colby, who was something-or-other on Madison Avenue. She at the age of thirty-five, chic if not specially pretty, trim-figured with the aid of a remarkable new bra, and he of roughly the same age (actually a trifle younger), amiable, friendly, personable in a downy sort of way, and pretty much at loose ends.

Pretty much at loose ends, and perfectly willing to have someone gather them up for him, if that someone showed the slightest tact in the gathering. He seemed to be completely unaware of what perfect raw material he was; content to drift, to meander pleasantly along—in short, to waste himself instead of assuming a settled, solid role in life of the sort for which his background obviously fitted him.

He had left his father's apple-country-squiredom at the usual time of youth to become an officer in either the Army or the Air Force—perhaps they had been one and the same thing at the time; Edna could not get it quite straight—and, after the war, had simply accepted a position in a distant relative's firm.

That was the thing—the thing about him that both attracted and angered Edna Arkwright, with her sense of greater things to be done with one's life, with her code of aspirations that had kept her firmly undistracted, steadfast in pursuit of her destiny. She conveyed to Jack, gradually but unflaggingly, that there was more in him than could ever be realized by a life of effortless progressions toward old age. What was he *doing* with his life, with himself? To this, of course, Jack had no ready answer.

It was plain to Edna that Jack Colby was not truly at home in the city; however much he might think he liked it, he was growing soft underneath and certainly drinking more than he should. In her complete sincerity of purpose, she saw in his eyes a hint of something that was, if not lost, then misplaced; she taught him to understand that she, of all people, could best remind him where he'd left it.

They were married five months and a few days after the cocktail party and, Jack's father having died and left him everything, went straight home to the ancestral manse in Dutchess County. There they lived comfortably and suitably, once Edna had wiped out

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the frowsty traces of Mr. Colby, Senior's, last years of bachelor living. There was, of course, a great deal of continuing work for Edna to do, a gradual transformation of both the house and the remainder of the property into a condition appropriate to genteel country living, as distinct from the functional but often starkly unpainted working farm she had found. For Jack, as a sort of gradually diminishing concession to his old habits, there were infrequent trips into the city to tend to the Colby investments and the business requirements of modern fructiculture. Except that, though all of Edna's other concerns prospered as if to prove the rightness of her planning, Jack's trips into town *did* not diminish as they ought to have. Despite her best efforts, some elusively stubborn streak in him would not relinquish its old ways, even after the passage of eight years.

And now, still circled by his mackinaw-sleeved arm, her neck prickled by the short brown beard he had at her behest grown since their marriage, she realized she had completely forgotten what day it was. Eight years—not long enough, it seemed, and yet perhaps already too long—and Jack had been out since dawn, it developed, doing something special for the occasion. He wanted her to come out with him after breakfast. Something to show her. A surprise . . .

But he didn't immediately say where he'd been till dawn. As if he hadn't even seen the necessity to make up a good story beforehand, and needed time to extemporize one now.

Over breakfast, he told her at last about the late poker game in the city, and losing track of time . . . deciding not to phone and wake her up . . . the slow milk train . . . getting home late, knowing he'd have to be up early . . . napping downstairs on the living room couch so as not to bother her . . . up early, and out . . .

She listened to him with careful gravity, then touched her lips to his forehead and went upstairs to dress.

She dressed in a cold fury, putting on walking shoes and a bright red jacket—it was hunting season—and realized only then that she had forgotten even to order anything special for today's dinner. Well, the woods were full of rabbits. She knew a delightful recipe for rabbit, and it would add something if they shot a couple for themselves.

It was inexcusable to have forgotten, she thought in a sort of additional annoyance; she had always managed things so perfectly. The restoring and remodelling of the old house; the garden club and prize flower growing; urging

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Jack to write little pieces for the Farm Journal; arranging for Jack to become an advisor on farming and animal husbandry for the local 4-H club; having the house eventually selected for photographing by a national magazine —these gradual shapings of a hundred details toward an enduring whole of gracious living, firmly rooted in all the most admirable attitudes and ideals.

But: the bottle in the toolshed, though they'd agreed with utmost reason that alcohol, for some people, was a disease.

But: the late homecomings, and the excuses, the glib and at first believable phone calls from the city . . . and now not even a phone call.

She hadn't allowed for this continuing goatishness in him. Could it be that her careful management of things was going to be overcome by the very person who was intended to crown them all? Was the intended ideal husband suddenly going to destroy the intended perfection of her life's work as the ideal wife?

Edna Colby saw herself on the brink of disaster, all because Jack, for all his excellent potential, simply did not realize what a difficult thing she was trying to do — how few women had the singleness of purpose successfully to take a man and mold him into everything he should be, and to provide the proper mode of life to set him off, like a perfect work of art in a perfect frame.

There had been a lingering scent of alien perfume in Jack Colby's beard.

Edna Colby clenched her fists. "Oh, no," she whispered. "Oh, no, you're not going to lose me now, Jack Colby." And then she turned and brightly went downstairs to look at Jack's surprise.

She found him waiting for her in the yard, gunning the motor of the jeep, a look of arch anticipation on his face. Obviously, he thought he'd gotten away with it again. Obviously, he expected that even if she were somehow suspicious, a little extra devotion on his part would smooth everything over.

She smiled, the perfect picture of the country matron, and got in beside him, sweeping her hands under the backs of her thighs to straighten her skirt. She pushed his hand away impatiently, her irritation breaking through long enough to snap: "Act your age, Jack!"

The little-boy playfulness flickered in his eyes, and for a moment she saw something else there.

"Really, Jack, didn't you get enough of that in the Air Corps?"

"It was the Army Air Force," Jack said, and put the jeep in gear. After a moment, he forced a rueful smile. By the time they

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were out of the neatly tended yard, in the center of the trim, freshly-painted outbuildings, she was a country gentlewoman again, and Jack was to all intents and outward purposes her devoted husband.

A two-mile jeep ride through the woods, and another half-mile's walking brought them in sight of a stand of fine young hemlocks. For three years, Jack had been promising her a hedge to shut off the pig-pens from the new sundeck view. Now he wanted only her approval of the trees before he started digging them out to transplant.

A pitchfork and spade, a pile of burlap, and a small hand-truck to take the young trees out to the road were already on the spot. Jack had his lunch—and a hidden pocket flask—along. He figured it would take him till mid-afternoon. Young Harold, the grown son of the farm foreman, already had instructions to get the trenches dug at the new location and come after Jack with the jeep when he was done

The trees were perfect. Edna said as much with delight even while she smelled again that musky trace of foreign scent in his beard. Later, when he bent over to pick up the rabbits he'd shot for the anniversary stew, she saw a smudge of lipstick on his neck. She had worn none herself that morning. The spot was covered by his jacket collar when she looked for it again. She smiled when he turned to wave goodbye. Her smile, she thought idly as she drove the jeep homeward to cook the special dinner, had been exactly right. He could never have guessed she was lost in contemplation of ways to make him behave from now on.

At four that afternoon, Edna took a spicy-smelling deep-dish pie out of the oven, checked the setting of the small table in front of the fireplace, and started upstairs to bathe and dress. That was when Young Harold came to tell her he'd been looking in the woods for an hour or more, and found no sign of Mr. Colby—nor any trace of work done on the trees. He had brought back with him the spade and pitchfork, the stack of burlap, and—though he did not tell her that at the time—Mr. Colby's red hunting cap.

"He must have walked down into town for some reason," Edna said as casually as she could, remembering the pocket flask. "I guess he'll phone if . . . maybe you'd better go down to the village and look around. He might have *tried* to phone . . ."

Harold went out, and Edna went upstairs. By the time she was bathed and dressed, and Harold had returned again alone, she was furious. Jack had never done any-

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thing quite *this* gauche before.

A half hour later, she was getting worried. By six o'clock she was sick with fear, and at six-fifteen, she phoned for the police. By seven o'clock, in spite of heavily falling snow, the woods were swarming with volunteer firemen, state troopers, and as many of the older teenage boys as could get loose to join the hunt. Edna answered the troopers' questions with as much presence of mind as she could summon. She told them what he had worn, and that she had brought the gun back herself. Young Harold, she said, had brought back the other equipment. She had gone out with Mr. Colby about half past eight. It might have taken half an hour to reach the site . . . probably less. They had selected the trees to move, had shot two rabbits, and walked up to a ridge with a favorite view before she left. She wasn't sure just what time she got back home; it was before noon. Mr. Colby had expected Young Harold to show up by mid-afternoon. And that was all she could think of that might help. Perhaps Young Harold could add something . . .

They had already talked to him. At midnight, they gave up searching until dawn. Next day, descriptions went out on police wires through the state, and across the country. By the end of the second day, the obvious assumption was already accepted, though the search continued: one more unfortunate hunting accident, with the body somehow hastily disposed of.

There was talk of dragging the old quarry pool, but the township selectmen frowned, pointing out the considerable distance between the hemlock stand and the quarry. They nodded their heads toward the over-night snow thick on the ground, and said: "Likely it'll turn up, somewheres, come Spring thaw."

For Edna, on the week before Christmas, there was shock, and grief shading into sincere loneliness. But it was on the day before Christmas that she broke down, alone in the old house where she had planned the old-fashioned Christmas Eve dinner . . . the roast goose, the pudding, the [illegible] in the fireplace.

She fled to New York, to spend Christmas at a hotel. Right after New Year's she returned just long enough to engage a caretaking couple, and to promote Big Harold, Mr. Vandervardt, Sr., to Farm Manager. Then she packed the few things from the old house she had to have—she could hardly bear to take even necessities with her—and went back to the city. It seemed to her that her own life was as good as finished. How could she ever hope to start, all over again, toward that at best

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difficult goal of complete happiness?

Still, she had to do something to keep occupied.

Ladies' Wear had no charms for her. She could still remember, quite clearly now that she had to think of it, the tearful interview with Selden's supervisor of personnel when she had, for the second time, been passed over when there had been an opening for a full-fledged Buyer.

"Look, Honey," the no-nonsense, severely tailored executive had said, impregnable behind her desk. "You're not going to stay with us forever."

'Oh, but I *am*, I *am!*" Edna had insisted.

"No, you're not. You're not the type. You got all your ideas of what you want out of life in the wrong places, for us. You think Paradise is going to have its floor plan reproduced in *Better Homes and Gardens* any day now. One of these days you're going to run across some poor defenseless guy whose main attraction is he can give you that kind of life. When that happens, you'll be *phfft*, out of here so fast you'll break the door down. We've got to promote the people who're going to stay with us."

The memory of that interview was sharp enough so that Edna's first thought of going back was her last.

She settled, finally, on a specialty florist's shop. Somehow, it seemed a logical compromise between her status as a businesswoman and the all-too-brief years of her recent past.

Like everything else to which she applied her diligent concern, Edna's shop flourished. She purchased the brownstone building in which it stood, and, allowing for business expansion to the second floor, began remodeling the upper stories as a town house. After the farm, she found a hotel apartment confining.

In the little spare time that remained, she betook herself dutifully, on the advice of friends and doctors, to parties and concerts and dinner engagements; she was introduced to a wide assortment of suitably eligible gentlemen, and was cynically pleased to discover that as a wealthy widow of forty-two she was patently more attractive to the male species than she had been as a bachelor girl of ten years' less. It all confirmed her suspicion that there were two main classes of men; those who were after her money, and those who were after Something Else. . . .

Edna Arkwright had been seduced, once, under a lying promise of marriage, by a plausible gentleman with the wit to see that she could be seduced in no other way. The widowed Edna Colby remembered too well the

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anguish, the hideous, weeks-long fear afterward that she might be That Way. She had no compensating memory of pleasure — the gentleman had been plausible, but he had done nothing to dispel the virgin impression that the girls who did It over-rated It in a spiteful effort to make their more strong-minded sisters feel jealous. And as for the rewards of motherhood, didn't she have her own mother's reiterated testimony, day after day through the years? Was the honor of living in the stink of diapers supposed to compensate for the horror of giving birth . . . for the hours on the agonizing rack, for the whole dirty, humiliating mess that was, in fact, a blind animal response to the indiscriminate need of the brute organism indiscriminately to reproduce itself?

"Jack," she had said firmly, and more than once, "that sort of thing may be all right for some people. But you and I are presumably *civilized.*"

There had been times, of course, when some of the bounds of civilization had had to give way. But Edna had always seen to it that even in those moments, it was clearly understood that a certain gentility must be preserved, as it was in everything else. Civilized people could hardly be blamed for the environment of their childhood—there was, indeed, a certain degree of merit in having risen from, for example, a two-room cold water flat on the Lower West Side to a charmingly restored farmhouse in Dutchess County—but it was certainly unthinkable to slip back into those discarded ways once they had been overcome.

So Edna spared very little time on gentlemen who did not remain impersonally friendly. She devoted herself to her shop and her new house with such energy that the one was a going concern and the other a completed work of the decorator's art in very short order. It was only then, with her social habits fixed and her workload diminishing, that Edna Colby had time on her hands.

She was not sure she liked that state of affairs. There were mysterious stirrings somewhere deep within her, and these speedily became a gnawing restlessness that no amount of late reading, exercise, or careful avoidance of afternoon coffee could keep from turning into a chronic insomnia.

There was something missing . . . something . . .

She turned and tossed on her bed at night until dawn came into the windows of her pink bedroom, and when it came it reminded her of Jack. Eventually, she found herself ridden with the notion that Jack was, somewhere, somehow, roisteringly alive.

It was a ridiculous obsession,

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she knew. But she could not allay it. She understood it to be a symptom of some private turmoil that was shut off from her conscious mind, and it frightened her.

Then spring came. The shop showed a disconcerting tendency to run itself. Daffodils and the first forsythia reminded her of tulip bulbs she wanted to get from the farm. She could have them sent down, of course. . . .

But she wondered if anyone had trimmed the lilac. And the next thought—of apple bossoms—convinced her that she *did* want some of the dining room pieces from the big house for the duplex. So it came about that on a warm weekend in the middle of May, Edna packed slacks and a nightgown in a hatbox, took the little-used car out of the garage, and drove up along the river to the old farm, unannounced.

She arrived to find the driveway rutted and ungravelled, the lawn ragged, flower borders untended, and the house itself smelling of dust and must. She did not stay overnight, but gave the caretakers two week's notice, and drove straight back to town to make arrangements for an indefinitely prolonged absence.

When she returned a week later, she was expected. She had written ahead asking a friend in the Garden Club to engage some help for the work inside the house. She arrived to find the Club ladies had already started work on her flower borders. The man and two women she'd asked for arrived at ten thirty on the dot. One of the women carried a basket ("Miz Barron said from the Garden Club ladies, welcome home") with fresh farm milk and butter, salad vegetables, a still-warm home-baked loaf of bread, and a foil-wrapped roast chicken.

All day, the four of them scrubbed and rubbed and scoured. By evening, the house was clean, and Edna was gloriously tired. She soaked in a hot tub, went to bed, and was asleep before she had time even to think about the sleeplessness of the past months.

"What a *fool* I've been!"

She thought it again as she awakened in the morning, with the sun pouring in through the sheer ivory curtains. And then it came to her, unaccountably, that she had once again failed to remember a date. For tomorrow, she realized with a pang, was her wedding anniversary. Was that, she wondered in surprise, *could* that have been what had brought her back here?

That day she was busy with visits and errands and arrangements. She had dinner out, with the Barrons; when she drove home it was nearly eleven. She went through the big empty house, checking doors and windows, then

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found herself oddly reluctant to go to bed. It was almost as if she were afraid last night's exhausted peace might not come again.

She went back downstairs in her negligee, made some cocoa, tried to read, and couldn't concentrate. In the end she turned on the television and watched it without interest. At the stroke of midnight, she turned her head and saw Jack sitting in his own favorite chair.

"Jack . . ." Edna whispered. "Oh, Jack, *no!*"

He sat there, as ruddy and bearded as ever, wearing the clothes he had worn that day five months ago, except for the cap, and his smile was a curious mixture of the tender and the flippant, as though he felt some need to make his first words cheerful. "Happy anniversary, sweetheart," he said, the cheerfulness not quite successful.

"But, Jack—"

"Oh, I'm dead, Edna. We'd better make sure you understand that. Do you?"

She nodded, carefully. "How—how have you been, Jack?"

He shrugged. "All right." He seemed listless. That was very little like him. Edna had learned to mistrust him when he acted out of character.

A host of thoughts went through Edna's mind. Suddenly, she was back to her mood of that earlier anniversary. Jack was here—in what way, made no immediate difference—he was here, and she could talk to him, see him, possibly even touch him. It was as if the intervening five months had never been. She wondered if that lipstick smudge might not be still faintly visible on his neck.

All this because of one unguarded tone of voice. But she knew him too well to let it escape her. Knew him too well not to understand what it meant.

"Jack—what *happened* to you?" The question popped out almost of its own will. She was teeming with things she urgently wanted to know, and she was still too numb to worry about the possibility of bad manners.

With the same forced lightness he had shown before, Jack confirmed her surmises of last December in a few halting sentences. A careless hunter had, indeed, shot the wrong game. Then, finding Jack dead with the bullet through his heart, the killer had chosen discretion before valor or honor. Wrapping the fresh corpse in some of the burlap, he had roped the whole bundle to the hand-truck, carted it cross-country for a quarter mile, and dumped the whole thing into the quarry pool, while the beginnings of the snowfall hid his tracks behind him. From there the hunter had vanished, presumably to his car

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and back to the city. Jack, in his typically careless way, seemed to bear him no particular ill will.

"The hand-truck!" Edna exclaimed. "My goodness, I forgot all about it and I suppose Young Harold didn't think to mention it, either. No wonder no one could see how your—that is, how he reached the quarry!" Another thought struck her. "But, that's terrible! Now your— That is," she corrected fumblingly, "They won't find you."

It was unthinkable — it was ghastly to *know* where Jack was, now, and to think that there had been no funeral and no proper interment. Jack . . . at the bottom of the quarry . . . roped to the hand-truck, in the black, frigid water.

"I'll have to tell them immediately. In the morning."

"Darling," Jack said in discomfort, "why should they believe you? How are you going to explain how you can be sure?"

"Why, I'll just . . ." Edna suddenly clapped her hand over her mouth. "Oh, darling, I haven't been *thinking!*" She flew across the room into Jack's lap, to throw her arms around his neck and hug herself to his chest. Only later did she stop to think it was only luck that Jack did, indeed, have the substance to receive her. At the moment, she was too occupied with holding and kissing him, having at last, and so abruptly, fully realized what a remarkable and wonderful thing had happened. "Oh, I'm so *glad* to see you! You don't *know* how lonely I've been!"

It was only gradually that she realized Jack was returning her embrace with perfect politeness but with an unmistakable desire to bring it to an end as soon as possible. "I *do* know, darling," he said uncomfortably. "You see, you're the one who's keeping me here."

She leaned back. "I'm the one who's . . . ?"

"It's—" Jack was plainly embarrassed. "Well, it's hard to explain about how things are. In some ways, it's a great deal like it was before I . . . well, you know. The countryside looks the same—but it's wild . . . there aren't any buildings, or roads, though it's certainly pleasant. There's something very odd about the horizon, too. Sometimes I'm almost sure it's flat; I think I can see a lot farther than I ought to be able too. But it's hard to tell."

"Are there any other people?" Edna asked artlessly. Even in her most distracted moments, she had found long ago, she was able to keep her head about certain things—and the suspicion lurking in the back of her mind had to be satisfied.

"People? Oh, yes, there're quite a few. I can see them, off in the distance." There was a wistful

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note in his voice. "I'd like to go and talk to them . . . see what they're doing."

"And you can't? Go over to these men . . . and women?" She traced one fingernail through the beard at the base of his jaw, studying his face.

"No, no, I can't. It's because you . . . well, it's because I can't leave the boundaries of the farm —except as far as the quarry, of course." He was fidgeting nervously, she saw; the fingernail was distracting him. Substantial or something a shade less, Jack had kept his old reflexes. She wondered who was keeping them sharp for him, if anyone was.

"And can't these people come to you?"

Jack shook his head. "I think it's part of the rules. Or maybe they just haven't noticed me, yet. Maybe I'm not really one of them —maybe they can't see me. I wonder if you might not be the only person anywhere who knows I exist."

"What about those rules, Jack? Hasn't . . . well, *Anyone* . . . explained them to you? Didn't Anyone *meet* you?" Edna settled into a more comfortable position on Jack's lap.

"Oh, no!" Jack said as if repeating the most obvious thing in the world. "The only people who can meet you are people who care for you. They sort of welcome you, I think. I don't know—I'm not sure I know—you seem to just *feel* the way things are supposed to be — but I think the amount of good that does you depends on how much you can trust your feelings." He shook his head, again, and Edna saw that there was much about his new life that troubled him. She considered that carefully.

"But, my dear, you have a number of relatives . . . *there* . . . It seems to me your father, at least, or your mother . . ."

"Well, no, sweetheart," Jack said. "You see, they had no warning I was coming. It happened too fast. Unless they were right there on the spot—and, of course, they weren't . . . And now I'm over there without anyone knowing about it, and I don't think they *can* find out about it, now. You see—" He patted her shoulder clumsily. "I don't think I'm really all the way over there. And that's because if no one knew I needed welcoming there, then it's necessary for someone over here, who loved me, to have said goodbye to me."

"*Said goodbye!*" Edna recoiled to arms' length, barely retaining her grip around Jack's neck. "I was so lonely I couldn't even stand to live here any longer!"

"Well, yes, sweetheart," Jack said tortuously, gathering her up in his own arms and holding her close. "Yes, of course you were. But couldn't you . . . well . . .

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let go of me? I *am* down in that quarry, you know."

His choice of words was unfortunate. Edna had a sudden graphic image of Jack, and the burlap wrapping, and the hand-truck, and the water, cold and black even this close to summer, and the weeds, and the fish—were there fish in the quarry? Someone might have put minnows in it, mightn't they? She prayed no one had.

She clung to the warm, substantial husband she had here, in the house with her, now.

"And let you wander away? To do I can imagine what?"

Jack winced. "But that's what it's *for*."

"*What?*"

"Not—not that—not what you're thinking," he said quickly. "I meant the wandering; the meeting people, talking to them, seeing what they do."

"Jack Colby, I've got you back and I'm not going to let you go."

Jack sighed. "Now, look, Edna," he said, "you can't keep me here against my will."

"You just said I could."

"Oh, you can keep me here around the farm. But you can't make me actually be here in the room with you, and talk to you, unless I help." And as if to prove his point, Jack suddenly seemed a shade less warm, a shade less substantial. His skin took on a curious transparency, and his chest did not seem to move with breath at all. His voice was distant, if rebellious. "If you feel that way about it, I can just make sure you never see me again, even while I'm looking over your shoulder."

"Jack!" Edna wailed. And at this point she was desperate. Her voice changed. "Jack?" Her negligee loosened a little at the shoulders.

"Edna, what in Heaven's name . . . ?" It was there, in Jack's suddenly wide and quite substantial eyes; the roguish gleam, that had twisted her heart bitterly only five short months ago but was her ally now. "Edna?"

"Don't leave me, Jack. Not tonight."

"Well, I'll be—"

Damned?

One night passed after another, and Jack never failed to come to her. Edna Colby blossomed again, and the house and farm had never seemed so prosperously trim, so efficiently run. The Garden Club ladies remarked on the amazing way she had taken hold of herself again. Edna had never been happier. She knew some of them considered it hardly proper for her to be so content so soon, if ever. But she *was* proper. Not even the most vicious gossips could find anything with which to reproach her. Some of them, she suspected, were keeping close

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watch on the doors at night, to see if perhaps somebody might not be . . .

But nobody was. . . . Nobody who needed doors.

Edna blossomed. She found, now that there was No Danger, that there was a certain element of . . .

Well, she said to herself occasionally with a certain kind of smile, Jack had never again made his ridiculous threat to leave her, had he? As a matter of fact, he seemed rather more . . . satisfied . . . then he had ever been, before.

There was, in fact only one problem. It was small at first, but it could not remain so. The future cannot be disregarded forever . . .

Edna Colby sat in her living-room, and looked around her at the polished wood of the authentic Dutch Colonial furniture, the multi-paned casement windows opening to the rose garden in summer-time, the creamy-yellow walls and deep-napped carpet. She looked at the dying embers in the great stone fire-place.

Last of all she looked into the shining mirror opposite her on the wall.

Edna was now forty-three years old. Jack had been thirty-eight when he . . . *died.* He had of course not aged visibly in the short time between then and the time when he began appearing to her. From what he said, his body did age somewhat when he materialized—but at nothing like the metabolic rate of her own.

Jack was from long-lived country stock—the kind who looks young at fifty, and feels it still at sixty-five. Edna had once been trim and tiny; during her widowhood, she had begun to think of herself as skinny. The past months had put weight on her for the first time. She looked herself over carefully: *beginning to show her age* was one way to put it; *dumpy* was another.

And the end of summer brought another nagging worry. . . .

It was September before Edna became seriously concerned. Up 'til then she could still remind herself that she was after all, of a certain age.

It was ridiculous. Suddenly peevish, she stood alone before the big mirror and slowly turned from side to side, examining a figure that showed signs of a specialized sort of dumpiness.

It was absolutely ridiculous. Who would have thought of taking Certain Precautions in these circumstances?

She stirred as if waking from a dream and moved slowly toward the sunlit library, where she took the big medical encyclopedia from the shelf, opened it to *Sterility, psychosomatic,* and began

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reading carefully. When she had finished, she went back and examined her newly-rounded figure in the mirror again.

"Receptive, relaxed attitude." If Jack had seen fit to speak to her about such matters, instead of simply busying himself with what she now saw was desperate enthusiasm, he might have used those words to her. "Banishment of fear-tensions . . ." If she had found the words to tell him how *she* felt—not *now*, of course, not now that this awful thing had happened — but last week, last month, yesterday . . . those would have been the words.

For one brief moment, Edna had the feeling of something lost; something that might have been, with just a little more time.

Now her mouth was a hard, narrow line, and the crows' feet stood sharply outlined at the corners of her clenched eyes.

When Jack appeared from behind the turn in the upstairs hall that night, he found Edna waiting in the middle of the bedroom, a carefully packed bag at her feet.

"You brute!" she cried out in a high-pitched voice. "You nasty *animal!* Get out of my sight!"

Jack stared at her. Then, gradually, the surprise was erased by an expression of dawning relief.

Edna finished: "You just *wait* 'til I get back!"

The relief disappeared from Jack Colby's face.

Edna had already informed Big Harold that she had been called to the city suddenly for a few days. She left in the car and drove not to New York, but to Boston, where she knew no one and no one knew her. She checked into a hotel and, first thing in the morning, phoned for an appointment with a nationally famous obstetrician.

Doctor Martin's receptionist was quite firm, at first, about there being *no* time available for the next two weeks. But in this sort of jousting, Edna was in her element. She emerged triumphant from the Battle of the Telephone with an appointment for that afternoon. She spent an edifying morning inspecting the Common, and a few of the more prominent historic landmarks. She made mental notes about other places to see later in the day; she would be interested in attending a talk on Winter Protection, at the Boston Botanical Gardens . . .

She never did get there. The doctor, a cheerful, chubby type, told her exactly what she had been trying to pretend he would not.

His examination was both thorough and expert despite its speed. Smilingly, he assured her that her symptoms were indeed those of an increased, rather than a diminishing, fertility.

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About four months, he thought . . . hard to tell without a definite date . . . and now, if "Mrs. Hartley" was planning to remain in Boston, he could recommend several excellent physicians. Unfortunately, his own time was full right now. . . .

In a dutiful daze, Edna copied down names and addresses. She accepted the little booklet of information he gave her, and murmured what she hoped were appropriate responses at proper intervals. She was halfway out of the consulting room before she thought to ask, "Isn't there some sort of a *test*, Doctor . . . ?"

"Rabbit test." He smiled, if possible even more heartily than before. "Yes, but hardly necessary at *this* stage."

"Oh?"

"Of course you can have it if you *want* it," he said patiently. "Any doctor you decide on will be able to do it for you . . ."

At Dr. Elliott's, "Mrs. Grahame," having taken thought, insisted on a test. She filled a small sterilized bottle for the nurse, and departed. When she phoned the following day—she had not been able to leave a telephone number, since she was registered at the hotel under her own name—the results were, as she had expected, negative. In the intervening time, instead of visiting Boston's historical or horticultural wonders, she had procured several books of a specialized nature in a small shop on Huntington Avenue, and had perused them thoroughly. By the time she checked out of the hotel that afternoon, Edna Colby, who had looked up psychosomatic sterility in the encyclopedia at home, was now also something of an expert on psychosomatic pregnancy. Enough of an expert, and possessed of enough additional personal knowledge, to wonder a little about how much psychosomasis there might be to some of the case histories detailed in the books.

For four hours she drove carefully and attentively southbound through moderate traffic; it was not until she found herself approaching the end of the Wilbur Cross Parkway and the beginning of the Merritt, that she realized she had taken the turnoff for New York, rather than staying on Route Six for Dutchess County. *That* wouldn't help. She was no more prepared for chance meetings with friends and acquaintances than for any immediate steps with Jack.

Accordingly, she left the highway, and headed due south for the Connecticut shore. At some small town whose name she never knew, she found a motel with clean white-painted cabins, and a chintz-curtained dining-room. After a quiet dinner, she walked down to the shore, and sat for a

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long while in the shelter of a rocky ledge, ignoring the cold and the damp, doing her planning to the rhythm of the white-foam sea.

If she could not hold Jack, without paying this price, then she knew what her choice must be. As the daylight waned, she began to think in cold, carefully thought-out steps without reference to or remembrance of the very longing that had brought her to this situation.

Edna stood up and walked to the edge of the pounding surf, seeing in her mind's eye, instead, the still surface of the old quarry pool. The way was clear to her now: the one and only way.

She shivered abruptly on the cold empty beach.

In the morning, she continued toward New York. She would have liked to go home and close the house properly, collect her belongings, and provide suitable explanations for the neighbors; but she could not risk letting Jack learn her plans. True, he could not leave the farm till she released him—but still, he might thing of some way to upset her program. So she wrote letters instead, and arranged things by phone, telling everyone that urgent business required her to leave immediately. Three days later she embarked on a prolonged tour of South America, where she thought she would be reasonably safe from chance encounter with anyone she knew.

When she returned to Dutchess County, it was four months, almost to the day, from the time she had left. She did not go to the farm, but took a room at an exceedingly middle-class resort hotel where she knew there was no possibility of meeting someone who knew her as the mistress of Colby Farm. In all probability, anyhow, none of her former friends would have recognized the fat-and-fortyish woman in the ill-fitting clothes, with the brooding face and the too-bright eyes.

She had tried to time her arrival so as not to have too much waiting, but she had not dared stay away too long. As it turned out, she spent almost two weeks in the dingy hotel room, waiting.

When the pains came at last, late one frozen afternoon, Edna bundled up, left the hotel without a word to anyone, and walked the full four miles to her destination, rather than hire a driver who would almost surely remember taking her out to the quarry. She walked haltingly, stopping to rest against trees and rocks for brief moments, then pressing on.

Fear and iron determination drove her. She was in a panic at the coming ordeal; the possibility of death, of some terrible crippling that would leave her alive,

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but helpless, freezing—with each fresh pain, her heart leaped so that she could hardly breathe.

But she would not give up. Jack had done this. He had returned all her devotion, all her dedication, in this monstrous way, and he would suffer for it.

Sobbing with effort and hysteria, she dragged the burden of her body up through the woods to the quarry's edge. And there, at last, she could stop, fighting for breath between waves of pain.

She swayed on the windrowed stone-chips near the quarry's rim, looking down at the ice below.

Jack was in there, she thought with wooden concentration. Down there, under the ice, wrapped in a rotting shroud.

"Jack," she croaked hoarsely. "Jack, I've got something for you."

As she said the words, the picture of the sodden bundle under the ice returned compellingly to her mind. For a moment, her resolution wavered. For a moment, it seemed easier to give in, to admit that it was her fault much more than Jack's. But she had come this far with immense determination and the courage of a martyr—if she gave in now, she would have wasted it all.

With a moan, she sank to the ground, struggling to arrange her clothes, flayed by the bitter cold. The contractions were nearly continual now. She raised her wristwatch to time them, in automatic accordance with the manuals she had pored over, but her eyes were misted with tears.

The pains were like nothing she had imagined—like nothing her mother had ever succeeded in describing. They were *directional;* great automatic spasms of her lower body that knotted her shoulders and thighs in sympathy, that surged like the sea turned to molten oil, that seemed to be trying to take control of her body away from her brain and relocate it somewhere in the depths of her spinal column.

She reached out frantically for comfort—she clutched the folds of her soft coat; she dug at the unyielding ground. She no longer thought of the danger in childbirth to even a hospitalized woman of her age.

"Jack," she moaned. *"Jack."*

From somewhere, strong hands were closed on her. "Bear down, sweetheart," the urging voice said; "push, Baby, *push.* Don't let it break you up. *Push."*

The knowledge of someone near—she barely recognized the voice as Jack's; the words were only sounds—was enough. One fraction of her panic ebbed away, and her body did the rest of its own accord. She was possessed by a sudden understanding of herself as a function, as a force; as an elemental, marvelously instinctive

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engine triumphantly meeting a resistance that was all the massive closure of extinction. Meeting it and, with a series of quick surges, suddenly relaxing so that her burden almost seemed to go forth and overcome it of its own volition.

"Take him – take him, Jack, quickly," she moaned. "Take him where he'll be warm, and safe."

She fumbled at her coat to cover herself. She was terribly cold. There was nothing on the ground —nothing that she could see; there was no sound, no cry.

"Jack? Jack—can you still hear me?" She had planned it all so well. Planned it on the basis that she would hate what came out of her torture. Planned it on the basis that it would be torture, planned on the assumption that it would be the best revenge of all to saddle Jack with the brat forever. "Jack—*is* it a boy? Please . . ."

She raised her arms. Silhouetted against the trees, she dimly made out a patch of russet color from Jack's beard, and the faint vertical tinge of his trousers. Shoe soles scraped very faintly on the stones beside her. And then she heard it—the faraway whimper of life—and she looked at the level of Jack's chest. There was something there . . . something . . . As the cry grew momentarily louder, swelled to a full-throated wail, she saw the boy, wrapped in his father's arms.

"Take *good* care of him, Jack," she whispered. She pitched herself up to her knees, somehow got to her feet. "I have to go. I'll freeze if I don't." She looked down into the quarry. "Goodbye, Jack. Goodbye—I'll miss you."

"Goodbye, honey," Jack said softly. "I'm sorry about the other girls," he added hurriedly, already gone from sight.

"It was my fault," Edna whispered. There were tears in her eyes as she thought of Jack and the boy, free to roam their world over, now, free to see what lay beyond the wide horizons. She turned sharply on the loose stones.

For one moment, she tried to balance herself. Then she was falling. One thought passed through her mind, in a familiar female voice, a voice out of her childhood: "By God, if that little snip puts on any more airs about being too good for me, she's going to hear a thing or two about what it took to bring her here." But it was only a fragment of something —perhaps her first conscious memory, rounding out her days into an ellipse of beginning and of end.

There was a shock.

Edna Colby never knew if her body broke all the way through the ice to sink into company with that other abandoned shell . . . She and Jack and the boy had gone to where the world was warm and green.

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This month's guest book columnist is a member of the Book-of-the-Month Club Board of Judges, author of INQUIRING INTO SCIENCE FICTION, *editor of the fine new* DEALS WITH THE DEVIL . . . *and a critic eminently qualified to discuss what a science fiction book must have to hit the bestseller list. . . .*

More Brave New Worlds Than One

by Basil Davenport

ANTHONY BOUCHER ONCE SAID, "MOST PEOPLE like fantasy better than science fiction, but they don't know it." Recent publishing history suggests that the world is full of people who really like science fiction, one form of it at least, but who don't know it. For, let us face it, actual science fiction, labelled and recognized as such, is still the concern of a minority; but four of the best selling and most widely discussed books of the last quarter-century were Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *1984*, Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, and Nevile Shute's *On the Beach*. And all of these, I will maintain, are science fiction. The definition of science fiction is notoriously difficult, but I offer as one possibility: fiction based on a condition which is contrary to present fact, and which is brought about by the application of actual or imaginary science. If that definition is admitted, all these four books come under it.

In *Brave New World*, of course, the science bulks large. It presents a view of society some six hundred years A.F. – After Ford – which might be called either a Utopia, for everyone is happy (except for a very few of the most intelligent), or a Utopia in reverse, for no one outside a concentration camp would wish to live there. The actual scientific means by which this is brought about are described at length: the embryos forced by hard radiations and by alcohol to bud and bud again, producing sets of identical twins running into the scores, the conditioning of mind and body that begins with the embryo, the masses kept happy by promiscuous sex and the harmless drug soma.

1984 as everyone remembers, presents a nearer and grimmer picture of the future, under the logical extension of Stalinism. There is not much science in the foreground, though the account given of the language Newspeak is a fine piece of imagination

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working along the lines of philology; but the world has been reduced to this state, plainly, by the application of scientific methods, from atomic warfare to brainwashing—that, too, is a scientific technique. In passing, it is interesting to note that Huxley has just written *Brave New World Revisited,* in which he admits that the totalitarian society is probably a good deal nearer than he thought, but still hopes that it will be more a matter of mental conditioning and euphoric drugs than of torture by cages full of rats.

Atlas Shrugged is still another picture of the future, in some unspecified period, when the United States is the last outpost of capitalism—there are references to the "People's Democracies" of England and the rest—and freedom there is collapsing under creeping collectivism and do-goodism. Miss Rand would probably say that this deplorable state of affairs has come about not through science but through the neglect of science, but she would certainly say that it is at least an extrapolation of existing tendencies, and the book contains one piece of straight science fiction—the creation of a new and superior metal, which has important consequences for the plot. Otherwise, her future society seems oddly old-fashioned, as if she were extrapolating from the middle of the thirties; the America she depicts is that of the depression grown worse, and there is no mention of atomic power. Her solution is the creation of what she evidently thinks of as a genuine Utopia, and one which seems to me far worse than that in *Brave New World.* All the truly intelligent and creative people, tired of being taxed for other people's welfare, simply withdraw, leaving the rest of the world to perish of its own inefficiency, and retire to a Happy Valley in the mountains, where no one gets anything for nothing, and *give* is a dirty word. That decided me about *Atlas Shrugged:* a world in which I cannot give gifts to my friends and gratefully accept gifts from them, is a world in which I do not wish to live.

Neville Shute's *On the Beach* is another warning picture of the near future, and one which has been brought about by the application of existing science, indeed of existing weapons. It takes place in Australia; as the story unfolds, it becomes plain that war has broken out, atomic bombs have been dropped, that everyone in the northern hemisphere is dead, and that when the seasonal winds bring the fall-out, in a matter of a few months, everyone in the world will die. In the face of this, people seem remarkably tranquil. Most of them continue to go about occupations whose meaning is gone. This seems to me neither

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probable as a matter of fact nor desirable as an ideal. If Miss Rand's ethos is too violent, Mr. Shute's is too gentle. I think that in fact there would be first a great rush to lay in enough preserved food to last out one's life expectancy; and that done, some people would take to drink or religion or sex, and some would say, "Well, before I die I am going to read through *The Faerie Queene*." And I submit that most of those are a better way of preparing for eternity or extinction than planting seeds whose flowers one would never see. Christopher Morley once said, "If we all knew there were just five minutes before the end, all the telephone booths would be crowded with people trying to stammer to other people how much they loved them." One might do worse than spend the last few months proving to some one how much one loved her.

It is interesting to speculate on why these books should have had so much wider a popular success than ordinary science fiction, and to see if we can find common qualities that would account for it. In the first place, they are all concerned only with Earth and Earthmen. Perhaps the general public regards space travel and time travel as too alien (though the original Time Machine was invented simply to allow Wells to portray one sort of Brave New World not so different from some of these, and his voyage to the moon portrayed another). The science in them does not strain the imagination; in most of them there is nothing but the application of existing techniques. Except for *Brave New World*, they are all laid in the fairly near future. And they all portray what may be human destiny. *Brave New World* is somewhat exceptional, in being farther in the future and having a larger proportion of actual science; but it also had, for the time it was written, a good deal of sex, including sadism; and it was not offered as science fiction, but as satire. That, I think, is important.

The conclusion that people are interested in the setting forth of their own fears (I am afraid, in the case of some of Miss Rand's readers, their own hopes) is an obvious one. I am certainly not offering it as advice. I hope I have made it clear that I do not admire all these books, and I do greatly admire science fiction that has real imaginative sweep. But it does appear that there can be a very wide public for at least the simpler forms of science fiction, if it were not offered under a name which the general public, however wrongly, associates with Blobs and Teen-Age Werewolves. Perhaps what we need is a new word, something which is to science fiction as "novel of suspense" is to "detective story."

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Evidence of Mr. Edmonson's talent for compression has appeared here before. This time he covers the ground between the years 570 and 2461, in a little tale of plagues, fires, and historical discussions—and he winds up with a most surprising twist with disturbing connotations.

The Misfit

by G. C. Edmondson

AFTER A POINTLESS DISCUSSION OF mushrooms which the waitress called *champiñóns* and I thought should have been *hongos*, my mad friend returned to the subject.

"Theology has nothing to do with it," he said, waving a forkful of *filet mignon*. "The Church has never voiced an opinion on time travel." *Viajes temporales* was the term he used, which carried unfortunate connotations of Renaissance diplomacy and the endless intrigues of Borgia popes.

From across the narrow room a gentleman who dined on pancakes gazed covertly at us with an eagerness in odd contrast to the splendor of his many starred tunic.

"What's his rank?" my friend asked *sotto voce* and in English. "I never can keep track of all the stars."

"I think he's a major," I said in the same language. I was trying to remember where I'd seen him before.

There was a keening of sirens, a clanging of bells, and an antiquated fire engine roared to a stop practically next door. Our waitress dashed out to watch. Our cook shot from the kitchen, abandoning priceless *filets* to cremation. Our wives stopped talking about whatever it is wives talk about and rushed out into the chill, November evening.

When firemen and a feeble stream of water were silhouetted in dancing outlines on the shopfront across the street, my mad friend also ran out. The magnificent major got up, bowed, and muttered the complicated *ronde* of gallant apology with which strangers approach in Latin lands.

"One cannot help admiring the *sang-froid* of the Manxman," he said.

I shrugged. "Picture postcards

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to the contrary, Sonora is cold in winter. I shouldn't be surprised if those unhappy *bomberos* became covered with icicles. Besides," I added, "a fire, I can see any day. But a good *filet mignon*—"

My friend returned with our wives and they sat amid a great chattering of teeth. The major brought his plate of pancakes and joined us. "We were wondering about your rank," my friend said with his usual directness.

But I wondered about something else. The major knew I was Manx and most majors have never heard of the Isle of Man. Then I remembered the *Princess Elizabeth* last summer. Not a luxurious transatlantic liner, but an ancient, coal-burning bucket which transports tourists and their automobiles between Vancouver Island and Port Angeles.

"You wore a different uniform and a different accent the last time I saw you."

"Also you," the major said with a smile. I had come unprepared for the frigidity of a Thanksgiving in Nogales and was wearing my friend's loden coat.

"I was interested in your theories about *viajes temporales*," the major said, turning his dazzling smile on my friend.

My friend muttered something rude in Arabic acquired during the stay in North Africa which contributed so much toward his madness. One of his redeeming qualities was the virulent hatred he felt for anything which remotely approached science-fiction. "Time travel stories divide themselves into two classes," he pontificated. He sang a few bars of "I'm My Own Grampaw." "In the others we're overrun by spear-toting hordes of our own ancestors —as if any modern couldn't defeat his ancestors practically by definition! You're not Mexican, are you?" he shot at the major.

"He had a Sephardic accent the last time I ran across him," I said.

"Also you," the major smiled.

It was true that my first Spanish had been learned from Sephardim, a colony of the confused in Constantinople whose Friday evenings were spent wailing not for Zion but for the happy land from which Their Catholic Majesties expelled them in that same year which had seen royal money finance a Genoese mapmaker's impossible scheme for reaching the Indies. Small enclaves of Sephardim survive in the carved up remains of the Ottoman Empire, still speaking a Spanish barely understandable to modern Latin-Americans. Apart from florid archaisms of an almost Shakespearean quality, its main characteristics is a tendency to turn every "s" into an "esh."

"Are you from Istanbul or Rhodes?" I asked the major.

"I'm from New Rome," he said sadly.

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"That would make you approximately 1600 years old," my friend said equably. "When did they stop calling it that?"

I riffled a mental file cabinet for a moment. "I think Justinian still said New Rome in 550. But Byzantium, New Rome, or Constantinople, it's all Istanbul now."

"Then you are familiar with the history of the Eastern Empire?" the major asked.

"Superficially," I shrugged, "Everybody's heard of Theodora, the whore empress."

"Would you like to hear a story about time travel?"

"My own grampaw or barbarian hordes?" my mad friend asked.

While I was searching for an indirect, Latin way to say 'no' the major made cabalistic signs. The waitress disappeared into the adjoining bar and returned with small glasses of cognac bearing a carefully separate layer of cream. My mad friend eyed his with an air of ineffable sadness and took another sip of coffee, which was all he drank nowadays.

"In the year of Our Lord 2461," the major began, "two students sat in the courtyard before the restored ruins of the Hagia Sofia. 'What do you suppose it looked like in the days of Justinian?' the physicist asked.

"The historian shrugged. 'Probably less magnificent than our modern version. Still, I'd willingly give several years of my life to see the Emperor Belisarius at the head of his armies.' "

"Wait a minute," I protested to the magnificent major. "After he reconquered the empire, Count Belisarius was blinded by the emperor he'd faithfully served."

"Like a certain general of our own time," my mad friend added parenthetically.

"In my story," the major replied, "Belisarius overthrew Justinian, and the whore empress went back to her brothel."

I glanced out to where firemen still squirted their ineffectual streams at a blazing *licorería.*

The major sipped at his creamed cognac and continued, " 'How much would you really give to see him in person?' the physics student asked."

"Another minute," my friend protested, "If this is an alternate time track story, you're beginning it all wrong. What kind of world do these students live in whenever it was or will be?"

"Ah," the major said with no trace of thinness in his smile. "As you know, Constantine abandoned Rome to the Barbarians and established a new capital which he called New Rome or Constantinople. In 570, Count Belisarius, after retaking Old Rome from the Goths and Africa from the Vandals, overthrew Justinian and became emperor of the Eastern Empire. The fabulous corruption of Justinian's court vanished

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with Belisarius. Through his reforms, religious controversy disappeared. Nestorians, Romans, and Coptics were reunited into one central church. Due to this revitalized Christianity there was no Islam. In this time track, a certain Mohammed was Bishop of Mecca and Medina."

My friend nodded his thanks. "And what was the status in your time?"

"New Rome ruled the world," the major said. "Or more specifically, the world's elected representatives convened at an assembly over which a Belisarian emperor presided."

"The whole world?" I asked.

"Japanese Christians, sailing from Hawaii, discovered this continent in 1361. Since the immigrants hit California first, the rest of the United States never became very heavily populated."

My friend gave me that special smirk which Arizonans save for residents of San Diego.

The major gave a quick glance at our wives, who were lost in a discussion of the botch look—or whatever it was women were wearing last November. "Returning to the story," he said, speaking English for the first time, "the physics student produces his machine and overpowers the ohs, ahs, and it-can't-be-dones of his friend. Eventually the historian prepares for a trip back to 550 A.D."

"How?" my friend asked.

The major snapped his fingers and our waitress brought more cognac. "First, by running a representative assortment of drachmae and obols through the duplicator. After this, a trip to the museum where costumes appropriate to the period were duplicated. Fortunately, the historian was conversant with Byzantine Greek and even knew Latin, should the occasion rise to use it. He took the usual immunizations which any traveller takes before going to a strange planet."

"Oh, you had interplanetary travel?"

The major nodded and snapped his fingers again. This time the waitress brought the bottle. "The Moon, Mars, and one of Jupiter's satellites," he said shortly. "Sounding rockets had given very discouraging information about other parts of the solar system."

Across the street, more than lifesized silhouettes still squirted futile streams of water. I nibbled at the strip of bacon which had been toothpicked around my *filet mignon* and noticed that the major's voice had thickened. After another drink he abandoned English. The "esh" became more frequent in his archaic Spanish.

"Now," he continued, "arrive we at the true heart of the story: Our historian steps into the machine, a strange affair of gleaming coils and heavy insulators—"

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"With sparks flying and much fluorescence," my friend added, straight-faced.

"*Exactmente,*" the major nodded. "An instant later he stands rather dazed by a waterfront which I soon recognized as the Golden Horn."

I had wondered how long it would take the major to slip into first person and now he'd done it.

"It was early evening and as I wandered along the dock a great many things crossed my mind. Was I in the proper period? Was my clothing correct? What tricks had time and research played on my accent? I entered a tavern and sat in the corner beneath a smoky light which smelled of rancid olive oil. 'Wine,' I said, limiting myself to one word.

"The fat innkeeper's wife waddled away with a nod which gave no clue to pronunciation. The wine was sweet and sirupy—the kind the Ancients had drunk well watered, but around me, swarthy men with a vague seafaring look drank it neat. Across the room one played *kottobos,* trying to splash the dregs of his bowl in a regular pattern on the floor. The general stickiness and sour smell told me many games of *kottobos* had been played since the floor last saw water.

"'What news of Belisarius?' I asked the innkeeper's wife. I wanted to ask what year this was but was afraid the question would sound odd. They might be having one of their periodic spy scares.

"The fat woman looked at me strangely. 'Africa, Italy, who knows?' She shrugged. I paid for my wine and left. There might be danger after dark but with my shield and weapon I felt secure. I didn't know the year, but if Belisarius rated only a shrug I was much too early.

"I returned where I'd first landed on the waterfront and felt about until I blundered into the time machine. My physicist friend had explained that anyone but myself was out of phase and would walk right through it. I set the controls for a year ahead and threw the switch — into blinding sunlight and facing a haggard wisp of a man who started at my sudden appearance. He gave a wild scream and fell backward. In the instant before disappearing another year into the future, I saw little except bodies stacked like firewood along the mole.

"It was early morning at my next stop, and a trireme waited for guards to open the floating chain which barred entrance to the Golden Horn. After several minutes the *kybernetes* abandoned his steering oar and sprang from the trireme's high stern to the end of the boom. He opened it himself. The trireme approached the mole, backed oars smartly, and tied bow and stern lines. As several important looking men in

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half armor stepped ashore, I saw my chance.

"Been asea a long time," I said, stepping into the nearest tavern, 'What year is this and why does everyone look so dead?'

"The tavernkeeper looked at me with dull eyes. 'I don't know whence you come, sailor,' he mumbled, 'But if plague's not struck your city yet, the smartest thing you can do is get out quick.'

"Plague! I'd read of it but never seen it. As I wandered about the city that day I felt a great affection for the peaceful and sanitary era in which I was born. It's one thing to read ancient accounts and another thing entirely, I learned, to watch an emaciated city die. My own immunity could not overcome the revulsion I felt for piles of corpses and apathetic, suppurating survivors with neither strength nor will to bury them.

"What year is this?" I asked an emaciated, yellow skinned man who squatted in the atrium of the Hagia Sofia.

" '563' he mumbled, 'Are your wits gone too?'

" 'When did the plague start?'

" 'Last year,' he said.

"I hurried on, fighting down a prickle of horror. For in my histories there had been no plague in the time of Justinian. I returned to the time machine and moved ahead twenty years.

" 'What news of Belisarius?' I asked the young man who now ran the tavern where I'd first drunk wine and watched sailors play *kottobos*.

" 'Who?'

" 'Belisarius,' I said, 'Who's emperor of all Christendom?'

"The young man gave a sour laugh. 'All Christendom's undergone several divisions since Belisarius was scragged. Surely you don't believe in that old jazz any more, do you?' "

The major sighed and poured himself another drink from the almost empty bottle.

"Good penny-a-word stuff," my mad friend said, "But I fail to see anything new or different about it. Why don't you take him back to his own time and straighten the mess out?"

"That's just it," the major said sadly. The Sephardic accent was growing stronger. "I came back slowly, in twenty year jumps, recording and photographing each time I stopped. There are no multiple time tracks. There's only one."

"What's the point?" my friend insisted. "You can't sell a story nowadays without a message."

The major glanced up from his empty glass with an expression of mild exasperation. "At the present time," he said with an air of ludicrous pedantry, "You have a strain of flies which grows fat on DDT. There also exist pneumococci, gonococci, staphylococci, and a

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great many other microbes which laugh at penicillin. On the other hand, those of us alive today are invariably descended from the survivors of every plague and epidemic which has ever afflicted our ancestors. Do you begin to get the picture?"

I did. "Then it was your historian who started the plague of 562?"

"And another one in 1348," he said with a sad smile, "The one which culminated in Wat Tyler's rebellion."

"Well, it's certainly a novel theory for epidemics," I said thoughtfully, "Do you happen to know who started the 1918 flu epidemic, or virus X, or the Asiatic?"

The major shook his head. "Whoever did it came not from my future." He was back in first person again.

My friend was somewhat restless, for he alone still drank coffee. "But this historian," he said, striving to get the whole business back on an impersonal third person plane, "came from a time considerably ahead of ours. Why not go ahead in our time to where he'd be more at home?"

The major poured the last drops of cognac in his glass and gulped them down. "Another fable of these times," he said irrelevantly. "Statistics would have us believe mankind lives longer each year. Can you guess the average lifespan of our historian's era?"

We waited.

"Forty years," the major said. "Oh, you can lower infant mortality. Get all those babies over the first year and you raise the average. But Cicero and a great many other ancients lived into their 80's and 90's.

"And what are we all but children of the misfits—the marginals who should have died before they reached the age of reproduction? With every step forward medical science shortens the lifespan. In two more years I will be forty."

My wife had been nudging me for some time. "*¿Nos vamos?*" she asked.

As we paid the check I saw the firemen were making no progress next door. If anything, the fire seemed to be spreading. "Well, it's a good story," I told the major in what I hoped was a sincere tone. "But I don't think much of the ending.

"In 1960 I shall be dead," the major said to no one in particular.

As we walked toward the car our wives still discussed the botch look in that fall's styles. Suddenly mine turned. "I don't believe they're ever going to put it out," she said, pointing at the firemen who now looked very tired.

And suddenly, the chill Thanksgiving wind seemed colder.

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Last month, Mr. Elliott recorded the experiences of the first men to explore Venus. Those men found the native Venereans to be incredibly passive—more, even while being tortured, the Venereans exuded a warm sense of love. . . . This month's story takes place on Earth several years later, when the Venereans chose to repay our visit.

NOTHING BUT LOVE

by George P. Elliott

AT THE TIME, I WAS THE OFFICER in charge of the Navy base on a round atoll south of the Marshalls, Paraklu-lei (Para for short). There were thirty men under me, and two hundred natives on the atoll. My main activity was keeping peace between my men and the native husbands and fathers. We were there to "hold ourselves in readiness"—which meant that we played a lot of poker, made love with all the women who would, sent in weather reports, refueled an occasional plane, and read bad stories. The native chief and I between us just managed to keep peace. Not order—peace: nobody got killed.

My brother Jerry, a Navy chaplain, was visiting me at the time. Jerry and I were very fond of each other and always had been; we saw eye to eye on everything but religion. At least I used to think we saw eye to eye; now I am not so sure. I am a good enough officer, but I would rather be a lawyer, as I had intended, than a lieutenant. I am thirty, married, six feet tall and rather vain of my hair. I was born and raised in San Francisco, and I prefer Irish whiskey to Scotch. There is in fact nothing notable about me at all, except that chance put me in command of Para during May of last year. But then, chance is enough: it puts kings on thrones.

The first of the falling stars we did not see but only heard about over the radio. It landed at nine o'clock at night, some 450 miles to the east of us. The plane that reported it was within fifteen miles of where it plunged into the sea and said that it was huge and white. A pleasant relief from rumors of war.

The second was about 300 miles

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to the east of us, and fell at 9:45. Two of the men coming home from the native village saw it like a pencil mark down to the horizon. The plane that had reported the first one reported this one, too. The third was just 150 miles to the east, in a line with the first two, and we all saw it. It fell at 10:30, within ten miles of the *Samuel Howe*, a tanker. The *Samuel Howe* said that the falling star looked enormous and white-hot, but that it made no perceptible noise and created no disturbance in the water as they had expected.

At 11:15, the fourth one, if there was any logic to these events, might be expected to land right on us. At least that's what the men thought, and though it may have been sufficiently superstitious of me it's what I thought too.

Ashton, the radioman, demonstrated to me—he was nuts about statistics—that the probability of another star falling in this pattern was so slight as to be nil; the exponent of his number was itself over a billion. I told him that the probability of three stars falling in this pattern was already nil enough to impress me, yet they had up and done it; in a case like this I'd put as much trust in a rabbit's foot as a number. He looked disgusted with me and went off hugging his exponent to keep him warm.

Jerry argued that Ashton was right. The cause of this phenomenon, he said, was either natural or divine. If it was natural then Ashton was obviously correct and we had nothing to worry about. And it could scarcely be divine, for why should God waste his signs and miracles like this in the middle of the Pacific? What can three shooting stars in a row signify? I agreed: they didn't signify a thing; and I agreed: it was statistically as improbable that a fourth meteorite should come along hitting us as that the sun should blow up tomorrow. All the same, at 11:05, I ordered Ashton and Jerry into the air-raid shelters with everyone else—the men were already there. We spent a bad half hour in there. Nothing happened.

Nothing happened, yet we weren't unprepared for the nude little men that came in from the sea the next morning. For as we talked into the night, it seemed to us somehow that neither the subhuman nor the superhuman explanations of these falling stars was right. Of course man had never done anything on such a scale that we knew of. Still if neither God nor chance explained them, then what was left but men? Or something like men. Something like those small, pallid, clawhanded creatures of Venus whom we had seen pictures of in *Life* magazine, years before. The

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Americans who had made up the second expedition to Venus had failed to return, after eight years. What did we know of Venereans except what the Security Board had let us read about in magazines, and what may the Board not have withheld? And these "shooting stars" were less disturbing if rational creatures caused them. After all, when statistical probability goes on the rampage, where are you? And you never did know for sure where you were with God. Now, men, or rational Venereans even, have limits; and whatever harm they may do, still you can understand it—you're like that yourself in a way.

That morning I was in the radio room with Ashton having a cup of coffee. He had made his weather report and was chatting with Samoa about the occurrences of last night. He was still mighty proud of that exponent of his. Neither of us seemed nervous or tense, but we were laughing too much. When a bug-eyed sailor burst in without knocking, Ashton jumped like a jack-in-the-box; and when he blurted out the business of the twelve little men walking on the water, neither of us said he was crazy but ran out to look. Samoa, who had heard him, was squawking after us like a mad goose as we ran out.

There they were all right, hairless and four feet tall, bobbing up and down as they trudged over the waves. They were close to shore by the time we got there, smiling and holding their arms out to us in greeting. They had a good deal of trouble clambering across the breakers, which were higher than they, but they made it. We were all so frozen with amazement that none of us thought to shoot them until it was too late. Too late, because by the time they were running up the beach towards us, defenseless and soft-looking and the color of underlog bugs, we could not have shot them if we had wanted to. The point is, of course, we didn't want to.

For they behaved as the first expedition to Venus had said they behaved: they suffused us with a feeling of well-being and joy and tenderness. A general sort of emotion, not about anything in especial . . . like a young fellow on the first day of spring ready to fall in love. Well, though I knew I should have ordered them destroyed (in a way I knew it), I just stood there, with Jerry and Ashton and all my men, and let those smiling visitors play on our emotions as though we were pianos.

What they told us was like what music says. On a perpetual base of this feeling of love, sometimes surging up and overwhelming everything else, they composed emotions of hatred mixed with sorrow; forebodings of dis-

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aster; pride as in a deed well done and at the same time regret that it was not done perfectly; spasms of murderous hostility suddenly cut short by remorse and pity; suspiciousness and dread of the twelve visitors themselves, which turned first into guilt and finally into a great coda of loving forgiveness of them. However any of us described our feelings afterwards, we all agreed on this last —we *forgave* them joyously, as though they had damaged us greatly but for our own good. A most perplexing feeling to experience, much less to try to communicate, being, as it was, uncircumstanced.

When, after fifteen or twenty minutes, they had finished, they clasped their claws in farewell and walked back over the breakers onto the sea. It was not till they were a hundred yards out from shore that I was able to do my duty. I ordered the men to open fire on them with whatever weapons they had. Our best solvator-shot aimed, fired, and apparently missed them all. They lifted their arms in farewell again, went down into the trough of a wave, and did not reappear.

Samoa was still on the radio. Jerry and Ashton and I, all of us confused and incoherent, told a reporter on the Samoa end what had happened. He informed the rest of the world that same morning of what we had told him.

The Russians laughed sarcastically at our low joke. The American newspapers played it up as a particularly wild flying-saucer story. The British played us deadpan straight. We had the distinction, until 11:00 that night, of being the most laughed-at people in the world. Some of my men became so outraged at the incredulity of the rest of the world that they would not listen to the radio at all. Most of us, however, pretending to understand how it was that no one would believe us, laughed too; besides, even if our laughter was out of the wrong side of our mouths, it was a safeguard against thinking about what had happened to us that morning. Only Jerry thought about it, and it wasn't till later that he told us what conclusions he had reached.

Forgiveness? What had we to forgive them?

That night at eleven, without explosion or radiation, New York, Washington, Leningrad, and Moscow, and all the people in them, turned into plains of dust.

By 11:30 we knew about it. Ashton and I were alone in the control room.

"My god," said Ashton, "the war is on. I wonder who started it."

"They both started at the same time," I answered.

"Someone always starts wars. And new weapons no one even

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hinted at." Ashton leaped up from his chair and danced about the room. "You know, Chief, it's a great time to be alive. These are better than miracles. This is the real thing."

"But look, man, 16 million people have been killed. And you dance."

"Oh sure. Somebody has to pay for progress. What's your kick? You weren't there."

I could find no word for expressing what I felt about him; I started to walk out.

But Jerry was at the door. He had been praying, and now he wanted news. We told him. He seemed to be not at all surprised.

"Well," he sighed. "Well, they had to do it. They will come back before they leave, and gain our forgiveness."

"Who?" I said irritably.

"The little fellows—?" said Ashton incredulously.

Jerry nodded. "We must love one another or die," he said, and bent his head in prayer.

Ashton and I looked at each other in horror for a moment.

"Four cities at the same time, and not even an explosion," said Ashton with awe.

"Jerry says they will come back," I said half to myself. "We must be prepared for them."

"Wait, sir!" said Ashton.

But I did not wait. If I had waited I might have started thinking how futile it was to do anything, and if I did nothing I might have allowed myself to speculate on what was happening, and that speculation I could not have survived sane. So I had the men work all night long setting up our searchlights and weapons in such spots as would command the beach for a quarter of a mile to either side of the place where the Venereans had first appeared. I tramped up and down the line keeping everyone keyed up and alert, keeping them full of coffee and fear, drilling into them precisely what they were to do.

One of the men, a machine gunner, objected that our monstrous visitors were immune to our weapons. Jerry had said they were apparitions, and Ashton that they had some sort of electronic bubble inside which kept them impervious to us. It didn't matter. We had to keep busy. I shouted the machine gunner down.

At dawn Ashton came out shaking with excitement. He had just heard from Samoa that Admiral Gregory was on his way down to us with some crack Intelligence Officers, who would be here by seven o'clock, and that the three top Soviet military men in the East, led by General Stock, were on their way from Vladivostok, in a jet. Jerry, he said, had prayed all night long. If

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Jerry had not been my brother, I am sure Ashton would have had some nasty crack to make; as it was, he looked at me carefully when he told me this. I tried to show no expression. Ashton vigorously approved of all my preparations: not because they would do any good, as he said, but because they would impress the brass. At that moment I loathed Ashton.

Well, at 6:35 a.m. the American brass came; Admiral Gregory gave a cursory glance at my preparations, and grunted approval of them. At 8:10 the Russians arrived. Then we held a conference in the control room. It was a tedious conference, partly because of the delays of translations and partly because nobody believed us. I told them briefly and accurately what I have already described. Ashton gave his interpretation — he sounded crackpot enough, I will admit. And Jerry gave them his. This was complicated by the fact that the Russian translator didn't know what *miracle* meant (it seems to have been dropped from their vocabulary), and that Admiral Gregory thought Jerry preposterous. Gregory and Stock radioed orders for submarines to be sent to the spots where the shooting stars had already been observed to go into the sea.

And the air-raid siren howled. We all ran to the beach.

The twelve Venereans, pudgy and smiling, were waddling like fifty-year-old clubwomen towards us over the blue waves. I heard—with gratification—Admiral Gregory gasp and General Stock grunt something under his breath.

"They're no apparitions," said Ashton to Jerry. "You can't see through them."

But Jerry was on his knees already.

Then the men opened fire. With everything in the book. Solvators, depressors, machine guns, rifles, Murdlegatts and bazookas. The Paraklu chief threw a spear. The solvator man refused to give up as everyone else did when nothing came of our offensive. He had a frenzy of shooting, exhausting two cartridges of solvation. He even, at the last, as the Venereans were on the last breakers before us, solvated the breaker out from under them. They dropped down three or four feet, looked surprised, and came on. The brass was duly impressed. The solvator man went stark mad.

At first the little men tried the same technique as they had the day before. But the brass did not yield easily. So without warning they threw us all off-balance by releasing the fiercest hatred in us, hatred of them only. Men turned purple with it. Their hands twitched to strangle the creatures. My legs ached with the desire to run at them and

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stamp them out. But none of us moved an inch; we were their pianos.

And then gradually our hating them became pleasant. We did not give up our hostility in the least—but we enjoyed it. We felt united in our hating and looked at one another, American, Russian, Paraklu, comrades in hating, loving comrades. So very pleasant did our hating become that finally we not only forgave the monsters from Venus for what they had done, we were grateful to them for having done it, for letting us hate them, for destroying our four cities, for uniting us against them. We were stunned by a paean of gratitude which finally dropped us all to our knees before our invading enemies, kneeling like Jerry, but for reasons we did not understand and full of emotions we did not really approve of.

I remember that when I became aware they were gone, I found my face wet with tears, and that when I stood up, still crying, I threw my arms about the Russian translator as though he were a dear friend whom I had not seen for years, and he kissed me on both cheeks.

General Stock is one of the three military chiefs of Russia, just as Admiral Gregory is "The MacArthur of the Seas." Their words are so influential that their experience at Para last May has produced the alliance we all appreciate. There are strong forces in both Russia and America demanding an immediate return to our former hostility, but the four dusty wounds where those four great cities had been have been enough to counterbalance the reactionaries. Still, as everyone knows, we can't get along without some sort of war.

For a month after the second visitation, cruisers patrolled the areas where the shooting stars had gone down into the Pacific. The ocean is over four miles deep in that area. It is very hard to get anything to go down that far and then explode, but we managed to do it. We laid a thousand eggs in a week, making the area so radioactive that nothing can possibly be alive for many hundred cubic miles. Planes (UN) fly over the whole region day and night.

Jerry goes around preaching love; a few crazy people believe in him. In America there was an article about him in *Life;* alongside a man who claims that the world has already come to an end ("we're all in Purgatory now and only the chosen will go to Heaven, if you want to get there quick, just follow me"), there was Jerry, earnest in the memory of his vision. *We must love one another or die;* he still believes it.

The UN has outlawed in the strongest terms the weapon

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which destroyed the four cities; whatever it is, whoever used it. The memorials to those dead cities are, I am informed, to be simple and powerful: on the American memorial, a ferocious, screaming eagle about to strike, on the Russian, a ravening bear.

On the whole, things have shaped up very well. The Russians, with a satellite umbrella and other devices, protect the Earth from invaders; we, concentrating on space-ships, are preparing an all-out assault on Venus. The Jerrys say we are mad; the Ashtons say that war with Venus is futile but that our endeavors will produce great advances in knowledge. I don't know: I want to get back to my law work and not have to think about the whole mess. In fact, I doubt if anybody really believes that we, in our present state, will be able to conquer the planet of love.

Yet, there is one thing I'm sure of, remembering the vast and beautiful gratitude I felt on the beach that morning last May: so long as we are united side by side against our enemy, he will not bother us again. What finer enemy could we have than this one, who lets us struggle against him to our hearts' content but punishes us when we ourselves begin to destroy one another . . . ?

Next Month Specials . . .

Robert A. Heinlein writes regrettably few short stories these days, so it is with particular pleasure that we announce that his newest will appear here next month. It is called *All You Zombies*—and it is at once characteristically inventive, steadily surprising, and wholly outrageous.

It is also warming to report that Alfred Bester has turned in a new story—*Will You Wait?* It is set in esoteric Madison Ave. advertising circles, and further than that we will only say that it is hilarious.

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Senator Ostabruk came to abandoned Mars with the conviction that nothing on it would make him recommend that the colony there be reestablished. How much would his report be worth, though, if it became known that he thought he had seen a human face outside the dome—a face unprotected by a helmet?

GHOST PLANET

by Charles L. Fontenay

IN 2195, MEN WENT BACK TO MARS. After a century of abandonment, the thin, cold air once more felt the thunderous blast of rockets as men in heated suits and plastic helmets returned to the windy deserts, the silent canals and the broken domes.

The first man of his generation to set foot on the soil of once-famed Syrtis Major was a senator of the Unified Earth Government, Laland Ostabruk. He stood in the still-smoking circle of canal sage incinerated by the G-boat's down-blast and stared out across the gray-green expanse of the low-land.

The other three men crowded out behind him.

"Should I claim it in the name of Earth, Captain?" he asked into his helmet microphone. "Or would that be rather foolish?"

"Not much point in it, sir," replied Captain Alfin Grasi of the spaceship *Rediscovery*. "We don't even know whether we want it yet."

"My first impression is that we do not," said Ostabruk firmly. He was not surprised at the ensuing silence, for he knew the men with him did not agree with this point of view.

He looked around him at the bleak landscape and wondered why man ever had wanted to settle this desolate place. An unbroken sea of canal sage stretched to the distant cliffs which rose to the Isidis Desert. Occasionally a canal cactus poked its heavy trunk above the sage. A tiny sun that gave little heat rode high in a blue-violet sky. Nothing moved.

Nothing moved, that is, but a wisp of smoke from the charred circle around the G-boat, and the three men behind Ostabruk. They stirred restlessly — Alfin, round-faced with wise brown

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eyes; Zhaam Wheetlund, the engineer, solid and stolid; Filo Kasun, the astrogator, thin and nervous.

Perhaps ten miles away—one couldn't be sure against the tight Martian horizons—sunlight sparkled on something that projected slightly above the sage. It was the remains of the old Mars City dome.

Once the gleaming dome-cities had spread all through the equatorial lowlands, from Aurora to Cimmerium, as men burst forth from the confines of Earth and made space their hunting ground. There had been Mars City and Charax and Hesperidum. There had been the private domes scattered between the cities. There had been the Charax Uprising, that won the Mars colonists freedom from domination by the Mars Corporation, there had been the Earth-Mars treaty that recognized Martian independence within the framework of the Solar Council. There had been airlines and roads, factories and farms.

Then the tide turned, the wave washed back. Earth's economy shifted, and the giant corporations that had financed space travel found profits too slim. The interlocked governments of Earth, concerned with local problems, had no popular support for sinking billions in spaceships, space stations, gravity-boats and expensive fuels. Gradually, one by one, the space runs were abandoned.

Most of the colonists returned to Earth, reluctantly, from Mars, Venus and Titan. Those left behind, refusing to give up the planets that had become their homes, could have been taken off at any time, just by sending a simple radio message to Earth. No such message ever came, and the G-boats rusted at White Sands and Capetown, while abandoned ships circled Earth in eternal orbits.

It was strange, Ostabruk mused, how the enthusiasms of the people ran in cycles. A century ago, most people had lost interest in space. Now there was a great wash of sentiment to return to space and reclaim the planets.

Ostabruk remembered, without bitterness but with a certain pride in his own good sense, his last fight against that surge of romanticism on the floor of the World Congress. One of the ten senators from North America, Ostabruk had led the Economy Party's battle against the resolution to send an exploratory expedition to Mars.

From the World Congress Record:

SENATOR OSTABRUK *of North America: "Mr. President and gentlemen of the Senate, this expedition would be a scandalous waste of the taxpayers' money. Does the gentleman from The Netherlands*

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seriously contend that we can afford such an enormous expenditure, when tremendous amounts have been earmarked in this very session for the continuation of the Antarctica Reclamation Project, atnd when further funds are needed if we are to continue to raise the standards of living in Africa and Asia?"

SENATOR VAN DER GOED *of The Netherlands: "I would remind the gentleman that we have a responsibility for the future of humankind. Antarctica has been conquered. What next? Space is our only avenue of expansion. Man confined to Earth is traveling in a blind alley. And, again, what of our resposibility to our brothers who, through these many years, may have bravely and silently manned the outposts on the planets. . . ."*

SENATOR OSTABRUK: *"Mr. President, will the gentleman yield?"*

SENATOR VAN DER GOED: *"I yield to the gentleman from North America, for a question."*

SENATOR OSTABRUK, *exhibiting a paper-bound book: "I have here one of those flowery romances which have glutted the market in increasing numbers during the last few decades. For the benefit of any of you gentlemen who are behind in your reading, the prevalent theme of such trash is a heroic 'lost colony' on Mars. I ask the gentleman from The Netherlands if this so-called literature is the source of his information on 'outposts on the planets?'"* (*Laughter.*)

SENATOR VAN DER GOEDS *"Mr. President, I see no point in continuing a futile argument. I call for the question. . . ."*

Van der Goed had won his resolution, by a close vote. In the corridor afterward, Ostabruk had congratulated him sardonically and reminded him: "Unfortunately for the pressure groups who lined up your support for you, Van, I'm the only member of our committee who's young enough to qualify physically for space flight."

That was true. And that was why Ostabruk was on Mars, instead of Van der Goed.

Now, as he and the three spacemen moved abreast in long easy leaps along the sage-grown road to Mars City, Ostabruk gained some understanding of the feelings that had drawn men to the hostile environment of Mars for many years. The gentle gravity gave him the sensation of half swimming, half flying. Although his marsuit and marshelmet enclosed him from the cold and the oxygen-poor atmosphere, he could almost feel the exhilaration of its chill thinness. It was like a mountain top in the sense of freedom it offered.

But, like a mountain top, it was deserted and lonesome.

"What's that, sir?" asked Filo,

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his voice booming in Ostabruk's helmet earphones. "Something's moving over to the right!"

They stopped, and Ostabruk saw it. Something white, gliding along the top of the canal sage half a mile away, like an inflated pillow-case. It disappeared and reappeared, bobbing up and down.

"Something moving through the sage," said Alfin, excitement in his voice. "Something about the same height as the sage."

That would be about the height of a sheep, or a large pig. The sage was about three feet tall.

A second white spot appeared behind the first one, bobbing up and down. Then a third, a fourth, a fifth. There was a line of them, undulating, moving away from the four men at an angle.

"Looks like a sea serpent," said Zhaam. "Or a sage serpent, maybe."

"Should we take a look, Alfin?" asked Filo.

"Let's don't tangle with anything we know nothing about, just yet," decided Alfin slowly. "There's nothing in the books about anything like that on Mars. Right, Senator?"

"Right," agreed Ostabruk. "Let's take a look at the city first, then worry about native life."

They reached what was left of Mars City a few minutes later.

The streets were grown up in canal sage. Above it thrust the ruins of stone and plastic buildings, worn and gouged by wind-blown sand. Over the ruins, the riven shreds of its plastic dome were draped, like discarded tinsel from a Christmas tree.

"Deserted," said Ostabruk, with some satisfaction, "Deserted for decades."

"What did you expect to find, Senator?" demanded Alfin bitterly. "Nuyork?"

The four men spent that night in the ruins of Mars City, under a ten-foot plastic dome that permitted them to sleep without mars-helmets.

It was Ostabruk who saw the ghost.

He awoke about midnight. The other three were asleep. Alfin had decided against their taking turns at guard duty, because, as he had pointed out, the only animal life ever found on Mars had been harmless.

The brilliant stars of the Martian night flamed above Ostabruk through the transparent plastic. In the west, bright Phobos was rising meteor-like, while starlike Deimos rode in midheaven.

Just outside the little dome, the jagged edge of a broken wall projected from the sage. It thrust up about eight feet, blotting out part of the sky. Against this black silhouette, Ostabruk caught the movement of something white.

Sleepily, he rubbed his eyes and

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peered more closely . . . as the white shape pressed up against the bottom of the dome.

Ostabruk almost fainted. A bearded human face, with round, inquisitive eyes, was peering in at him!

"Alfin!" he bellowed, struggling to his feet.

There was a confused tangle as his three startled companions were yanked out of sleep around him. The face vanished from beyond the plastic and the white body scurried away around the black wall.

"What is it, Senator?" asked Alfin. He was on his feet, mars-helmet in one hand, heat-gun in the other.

"A face! A man's face!" yipped Ostabruk, pointing.

They all stared in the direction he indicated. There was nothing to be seen.

"Are you sure you weren't dreaming, Senator?" suggested Alfin carefully.

"Impossible! I was wide awake. Not only was it a man's face, but he didn't have on a helmet."

"That's more of an impossibility than that you were dreaming with your eyes open, Senator. A man might live in the Martian atmosphere without a helmet for perhaps as much as ten minutes, but where could he go, here in ten minutes? What breathable air could he have come from in ten minutes?"

"But I saw him!"

"At least," remarked Alfin drily, "it's appropriate that the accusing ghosts of the abandoned Martian colonists should appear to you and not to us, Senator."

"Maybe it was one of the survivors of the colonists, Alfin," suggested Filo hurriedly.

"I'll believe in a dream or a ghost first," retorted Ostabruk with some heat. "The whole objection practical men on Earth—and I include myself — have to planetary colonies is that they can't exist without strings to Earth. They call themselves independent, but they depend on Earth for oxygen machinery, dies, plastics, everything. The Martian colonists are long dead, and anyone who says differently is just romancing."

No one disputed his words. The ruins of Mars City were bleak evidence in support of them.

Even so, Ostabruk slept only fitfully the remainder of the night. He had seen a human face, but by his own argument he could not have seen one. He had seen films and carvings of the extinct big-eyed, big-eared Martian natives, and there was no chance that what he had seen could have been a Martian. Although he believed in ghosts no more than any other practical man, he was disturbed by Alfin's suggestion that he might be haunted by the apparition of one of those people whom

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Earth's practical men had left to die on Mars a century earlier.

In the morning, the four men separated to explore the ruins for artifacts or, possibly, messages left by the colonists. They kept contact with each other by mars-helmet radio as easily as though they were face to face. Ostabruk took the northeast sector, from which the road once had run to Marsport, and was soon out of sight of the others behind the ruins of building walls.

Ostabruk walked between the wrecked buildings, along what had been streets. He moved carefully, trying to avoid holes. The tops of the sage plants spread so that they formed a solid layer several inches thick about three feet above the ground, even when the plants were several feet apart. It was impossible to see the terrain over which he walked, and he stumbled frequently.

All around him there were evidences of a once-great city. Within the shattered walls, there were sometimes whole floors that remained, some of them with broken furniture scattered around. Everything had been worn down, eroded sometimes almost to the vanishing point by the fine sand the Martian wind bore across even the gray-green lowlands.

In the ruins of one large building, he found a book in a niche in the wall, where it had been protected from the blowing sand. The paper was well preserved, although the binding fell loose when he picked it up and the pages fluttered down to the sand-drifted floor. The one page he still held in his hand was torn in half. In very large print on the top half were the words:

Mars is a world. People live on Mars. It is a. . . .

He let the half-page drop and walked out of the building. The dim legend over the door read: MARS CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL No. 3.

The words ran through his mind as he walked down the street, only half listening to the messages back and forth from men he could not see because of the intervening ruins. *Mars is a world. People live on Mars.* No more. Mars is a world, but people do not live on Mars.

The children had played there in the schoolyard, where now the canal sage grew. They had sat in classrooms where now the red sand drifted, looking wistfully out the window or solemnly reading the words: *Mars is a world. People live on Mars.* And they had run, laughing and shouting, down these now-deserted streets to living homes, to mothers who complained about household chores as Earth mothers complained, to fathers who worked as Earth fathers worked.

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What was it Goldsmith had written of *The Deserted Village*?

No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread,
For all the bloomy flush of life is fled.

He realized that he had circled, and was heading back toward the edge of the city where they had entered it. Beyond it, he saw the tapered nose of the G-boat thrusting upward in the morning sunlight, far away across the sage.

". . . . At least 75 years, because the last date I've found was 2120," someone—it sounded like Filo—was saying in his marshelmet earphones. "How could they have gone to pot completely in 25 years?"

"Not hard at all, when they couldn't get replacements for machine parts." This time it was definitely Alfin's voice. "In this environment, the peak of a machine civilization is necessary to maintain any sort of a city at all."

"Earth abandoned them," said Filo resentfully. "Earth left them here to die."

Ostabruk resisted the temptation to enter the conversation with a rebuke. Good Lord, what did these men want? What did they expect? They seemed to think he should recommend recolonization of Mars just because the planet was there.

Alfin had put it into words once, when the atom-powered *Rediscovery* was in orbit between Earth and Mars: "Man ought to stay in space because he can go into space. He ought to colonize the planets because he can colonize the planets. Earth can't hold man forever. If he stops going out as far afield as he can go, he stops living as man and becomes a well-adjusted animal."

The philosophy of the pioneer. But pioneering had always been required to pay for itself. If it didn't, the pioneers had no right to live where even a marginal existence was impossible if they were cut off from Earth. Where man could adapt, let him live; where he could not, let him shun: that was Ostabruk's way of looking at it.

So far there had been no real evidence that he was wrong.

His eye caught a whisper of movement out over the lowland. He peered closely and discerned a wisp of smoke rising above the sage in the still air.

This was impossible. It was as impossible that there should be fire and smoke in the oxygen-poor Martian air as that a helmetless man should have pressed his face against the outside of their dome. It must be a sand-devil—but it was staying in one place.

There was movement near the smoke. Something white undulated just above the sage, appearing and disappearing.

"Alfin," said Ostabruk, "I see

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something that looks like smoke, and another sage serpent near it. It's out roughly in the direction of the G-boat."

"Can you get a good look at it with the glasses, Senator?" asked Alfin.

"I'm not high enough for a good look. I'll find something to climb on."

There was the jagged ruin of a wall near him. It was about a foot thick, and was broken near the ground at one end. Ostabruk scrambled up it, panting with the effort. Near the wall's highest point he squatted precariously and unslung his field glasses.

A stone broke under his foot and he pitched forward.

"Alfin!" he yelped desperately.

In the long moment it took him to fall, Ostabruk's frantic mind tried to argue him of out of danger. The Martian gravity was slight: he was falling slowly. The canal sage was thick: it should cushion him.

He crashed through the sage as through paper. His head and shoulder struck the ground with shocking force.

In the despairing instant before he lost consciousness, Ostabruk realized his marshelmet was smashed.

Ostabruk floated in a golden haze. Above him towered three wraith-like giants, discussing his fate in solemn tones. One of them seemed to think that he should be given another chance, while another held that he should be forced to adapt or die. The third nodded at each argument, without indicating which he favored.

Consciousness returned to Ostabruk suddenly, and he opened his eyes. He was still enveloped in a golden haze, but he was lying on his back on the ground. A sheet of golden green formed a roof two feet in front of his face. A fragrant, woodsy aroma filled his nostrils.

Ostabruk stirred and groaned. His neck and shoulder ached. His face smarted, and when he put his hand to it, his fingers touched drying blood from half a dozen cuts.

His marshelmet was broken! He had no helmet on his head, yet he was alive!

Had he, then, been unconscious less than ten minutes? But he was breathing, and the air was sweet.

The voices were still in his ears, faintly, but they were not the voices of wraiths. They were the voices of his three companions, coming from the dangling marshelmet earphones.

"He must have fallen under the sage," said Alfin's voice. "We'll never find him unless one of us stumbles over him. If he's just unconscious, he's alive, but if his helmet broke . . ."

But his helmet had broken, and

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he was alive! Excitedly, Ostabruk spoke into the microphone, in the jagged remains of the helmet that still encircled his neck.

"Alfin!" he cried. "Alfin, something's happened to the atmosphere of Mars. The colonists must have changed it. That could have been a man I saw! That could have been a fire . . ."

He stopped. Alfin was still talking, in the earphones.

". . . have to find him before night," Alfin was saying. "Our own oxygen supplies won't last much longer . . ."

"Alfin!" shouted Ostabruk into the mike. "Alfin, can't you hear me?"

". . . city's too big." That was Zhaam's voice. "We'll have to search street by street."

Ostabruk's helmet radio could still receive, but the transmitter was broken.

There was no reason why he could not just get up and find them. He felt a little dizzy and weak, but it shouldn't take too long to run across one of them if he got up and moved around the city.

With a little difficulty, he sat up. His head thrust into the aromatic canopy of canal sage foliage.

He got to his hands and knees, and then to his feet. The sage, the ruins, stretched all around him. It was afternoon.

He took a deep breath, and gasped in the thin Martian air. He choked. He was unable to breathe! Dizziness swept over him, and he fell to the ground again.

At once, he was breathing sweet air. He lay there, recovering his breath.

Methodically, Ostabruk went over in his mind the thorough briefing he had received on Martian conditions.

"During daylight the Martian plants produce their own oxygen through photosynthesis," had said his instructor, a thin-faced man named Sims. "At night, the plants have no surplus of oxygen in the atmosphere as on Earth. There is evidence that they stave off oxygen deficiency at night partially by storing oxygen in the intercellular air spaces of stems and leaves, which are larger than in Earth plants."

There had been insufficient evidence to satisfy botanists that this scheme would be adequate for the canal sage, although the hollow interior of the canal cactus could store a large amount of air. So they had assumed for the canal sage a state of dormancy at night, in which it used comparatively little oxygen.

Now Ostabruk realized he was in a position to tell the botanists something they had failed to discover in a hundred years of Martian settlement and exploration. The canal sage leaves formed an

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air-tight roof two or three feet above the ground. Under this roof, they trapped the excess oxygen they produced during daylight, creating for their nighttime needs a thin layer of breathable atmosphere along the ground.

Perhaps, in the days of Martian colonization, that fact had been discovered more than once by explorers who either failed to realize its scientific significance or were unable to return to the oxygenized domes. It would be unlikely to be known generally except by accident, for man walked erect, his breathing assured by marshelmets, and the tops of the sage plants were less than waist high.

The stems of the sage plants were about a foot and a half apart. There were no leaves below the bushy, flattened tops of the plants, and ground below them was a springy mattress of decaying leaves and twigs. Ostabruk lay in a dim, low-vaulted world that stretched interminably away from him in three directions, ending in the fourth against the wall that had spelled disaster for him.

A man could live about ten minutes in the upper air, if he held his breath—could walk for maybe two minutes. Ostabruk got to his feet again, unsteadily.

There was no one in sight. Only the sage and the ruins.

He tried to walk, but, without breathing, he was unable to make much headway.

When he could hold his breath no longer, he ducked below the sage again, panting. He was dizzy and weak. The voices still murmured in the marshelmet earphones. Alfin, Zhaam or Filo might be just beyond a nearby wall. There was no way he could tell.

The jagged circle that remained of his marshelmet was menace around his neck. He took it off and threw it aside.

After a while, Ostrabruk got to his feet again, holding his breath.

His heart jumped. A marsuited figure was no more than a hundred yards away, moving slowly through the sage.

But the man, whoever it was, had his back to Ostabruk. He was moving slowly away from Ostabruk.

Ostabruk let out his breath in a mighty shout that wailed thin and plaintive in his ears.

Whether the other could hear that shout, through rare Martian air and insulating marshelmet, Ostabruk could not know. He stopped and began to turn his head, slowly.

But the effort had been too much for Ostabruk, and there was no air in his lungs now. He pitched forward into the sage again, his senses leaving him.

When he regained them again, he was lying on his stomach in utter blackness. No whisper of sound came through the marshel-

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met earphones when he found them in the darkness and held them to his ear.

He stuck his head above the sage momentarily. He had a glimpse of jewelled stars in a velvet sky.

It was night, and the others had returned to the G-boat.

Crawling was harder than walking, but he could crawl and breathe at the same time. Ostabruk crawled. He had tried to crawl at night, but had run into a tangle of canal sage stems in the darkness and had had to await the day.

At least, the sage foliage trapped the daytime heat, as well as oxygen. He had been cold during the night, but outside he would have frozen, without the marshelmet to seal his suit.

He headed for the G-boat, keeping his direction by peeking occasionally above the sage. How far? Ten miles? Twenty miles? He didn't know. It had seemed a short distance, leaping in the light Martian gravity two days ago, but now the G-boat seemed to get no nearer.

Ostabruk prayed that Alfin would not decide to blast off for the return to Earth, now that he was presumed dead. He prayed that Alfin and the others would take time to return and search for his body.

He had awakened hungry and thirsty, but canal sage leaves were edible raw, and they contained enough water to assuage his thirst somewhat.

About mid-morning, he reached the base of a canal cactus perhaps a mile from the edge of Mars City. There was a small hole, about eight inches in diameter, in the cactus at ground level. It looked as though it had been gnawed.

Ostabruk cogitated. Two forms of animal life had been known on Mars. The intelligent Martians had small round bodies with long, spidery limbs, and took oxygen from the soil, storing it in a huge hump. The other known representative of Martian life was a rabbit-sized animal that breathed normally, and zoologists had been unable to determine how it could exist in the thin air.

Ostabruk knew now that these animals lived under the sage. But the important fact was that they were vegetarian and harmless.

Ostabruk took his knife from his belt and cut the hole larger. He crawled into the cactus. It was empty of animal life, but there was a pool of brackish water in its cup-shaped base. He drank drank greedily.

He could live. He had food, of a sort, and air and water. But could he reach the G-boat before Alfin gave up the search for his body, and decided to leave Mars? After all, he was presumed dead

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by now, and with his assumed death the reason for continuing the Martian expedition had ceased to exist. Alfin was wise enough in the ways of politics to know that the World Congress would not accept the findings of a trio of spacemen, when a senator had been sent to make the study.

It occurred to Ostabruk that he almost certainly would have been found the day before in Mars City if he had ripped off part of his clothing and thrust it above the canal sage as a distress flag. He had been too dazed and weak from his fall to think of it then. Now it would not help him. Alfin and the others would not be searching the sage with glasses for a live Ostabruk. If they sought him at all, it would be a painstaking search under the sage in Mars City for his body. There was no point in waving a flag unless he caught sight of them moving near him; and he had not seen them yet, in his periodic rises to the surface to get his bearings.

Ostabruk crawled all that day under the sage. The G-boat towered, sparkling in the sunlight, ahead of him when he stuck his head up, but he neared it with agonizing slowness.

That evening he saw ghosts again.

It was just before the abrupt fall of night. Ostabruk, his hands and knees raw from crawling, had stopped and was munching on some canal sage leaves. In the golden gloom, at the extreme limit of his vision, his eye caught movement.

There were several white figures moving there, under the sage. At that distance, he could not be sure of their size, but they looked much larger than rabbits.

It was dangerous to use the heat-gun under the sage. If he blasted a large hole in the leafy roof, the oxygenated air would rush out and he might be asphyxiated before the sensitive plants could adjust themselves to seal the break.

But Ostabruk adjusted the gun to a pencil-narrow, killing beam and let fly in the direction of the moving figures. Sage stalks in its path smoked and toppled. Ostabruk could not tell whether he had hit any of the figures, but they vanished and he saw them no more.

He was fortunate to find a canal cactus nearby. He spent the night in it, sleeping fitfully in a sitting position, his heat-gun trained on the hole through which he entered it.

Another day Ostabruk spent crawling, crawling under a golden-green canopy of sage leaves. But the G-boat was nearer now, much nearer. It towered taller in the sky. He could reach it by nightfall.

He planned his approach care-

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fully. He would have to cross the burned circle of the G-boat's blast-down area, holding his breath until he could wrench open the door and enter the airlock. To do it in ten minutes, he would have to circle the G-boat under the sage and rush across the burned area from the east, for the entry port faced eastward.

The last time he poked his head up to take his bearings, the G-boat was close enough for him to distinguish the rivet heads around its ports, so clear was the Martian air. He dropped below the sage and crawled toward it in frantic haste.

The ground trembled under him and a thunderous roar filled his ears. In the dimness ahead of him, a wash of flame transformed the gloom into a distant blazing inferno.

Weak from hunger, exhausted from his two days of exertion, Ostabruk summoned the supreme strength to stumble to his feet and stand tottering above the sage. The air choked him.

The G-boat was rising on a column of fire, ever more softly. It tilted its broad wings and faded into the darkening western sky.

He was marooned.

"Alfin, come back!" he shouted into the dead air of Mars. "I'll recommend recolonization! Anything . . .! Alfin . . . !"

Once more he fell, the precipitous blackness of the Martian night mingling with the deeper blackness that overcame his brain.

Ostabruk was delirious most of the time. In his non-delirious interludes, he was being carried in a stretcher, under the sage. The stretcher was borne by white, hairless animals that swayed and humped as they moved along. Ostabruk, dizzy and feverish, could see nothing but dead-white, naked flanks.

When Ostabruk's mind cleared at last, he was lying on an aromatic carpet of decaying sage. A pale, naked woman—a very attractive woman despite uncombed hair that hung to her waist—was bending over him, cooling his forehead with a handful of moist leaves. A few feet away an older, fatter woman squatted and talked with a stooped, bearded man. They, too, were pale and naked.

Ostabruk lay there and let his eyes wander over evidences of a primitive society. There were men, women and children scattered around, perhaps a score of them within range of his vision, all naked and all very pale. There were beds of sage leaves on the ground, and crude utensils made of the sage stems and the canal cactus, with the occasional addition of some metal that must have come from the vanished civilization of Mars City. Somewhere there was a fire, for he got a whiff of fragrant smoke now and then.

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There was something different here. The sage was taller! It was tall enough for these people to stand upright.

But the important thing was that these people lived here, without technology! They had adjusted. Mars was a different world from Earth, a different environment, and these people, faced with the alternative of adjustment or death . . . lived!

The old man realized he was conscious, and came over to him. He spoke. Incredulously, Ostabruk realized he spoke English, though the accent was strange.

"You are feeling better, yes?" asked the man.

Ostabruk sat up, fighting off dizziness.

"Yes," he said. "I'll be all right. You're descendants of the lost colonists."

"Yes," said the old man proudly. "Our fathers stay on Mars. Our fathers fight Mars. It is long fight, but we win. Some day . . ."

He left the sentence unfinished, suspended in a vision.

"You were lucky to find this," said Ostabruk, waving his hand around. "The sage is taller here."

"Lucky?" repeated the old man scornfully. "We make this sage tall. We mate seeds of tallest sage. The little germs in the cells, we double them to make bigger sage. We do not find tall sage, we make it!"

Ostabruk stared at him. Good Lord! Hybridization . . . tetraploid plants . . . developed by these savages?

No, they were not savages. They were civilized men and women, with brains and guts, who did not weep for a lost technology, but built on what they had, from the ground up. He had been wrong: he saw the old man's vision now, of a roof of sage stretching eight, ten, twenty feet high, from cliff to cliff across the lowlands and along the canals, a green-gold roof under which men lived and prospered and progressed—without help from Earth.

Lucky for him he had been wrong—he was alive because he had been. He got to his feet, shakily, and held out his hand.

"Meet your newest colonist," he said. "I'm Laland Ostabruk, and I hope you'll vote for me when election rolls around."

"Election?" repeated the old man, puzzled. He gave Ostabruk his hand, doubtfully, and Ostabruk gripped it.

"Why, yes," said Ostabruk easily. "We'll have to have one eventually, you know. When the Earth ships come back, Mars should be entitled to two or three senators in the World Congress."

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Gayla came from Setem, the second planet of Alpha Centauri. She had enormous blue eyes, golden hair that streamed like low-down sunshine, a magnificent chest, and a warm, outgoing personality. A harmonica was of some use in defending against her —but on the whole it would have been better if she'd landed on Venus.

Natural Frequency

by Raymond E. Banks

BECAUSE I HAD BEEN TO SETEM, which is the second planet of Alpha Centauri, the State Department chose me to escort the lovely Gayla on her first trip to Earth. She was the first true alien ever to visit Earth, and it was an historic occasion. The visit was spiced further because she'd chosen to visit the people of the free world first instead of the Russians.

It was a big break for me—my chief said.

"I resign," I said.

Ben Fairchild, my chief, is used to the non-diplomatic strain in me. I'd been a space pilot most of my career—had started my second career in the State Department less than two years before. Nearing forty, it's hard to learn new tricks.

"Danny, you're out of your mind!" he said. "The Russians are green with envy. They'll be watching—every TV set in the world will be. And there *you'll* be —at her side. From an obscure nobody to center of the stage."

"I resign," I repeated. But I didn't do it, because he threatened to have me tried for high treason.

I knew his problem. He'd bragged about me to *his* chief and he to *his* chief, and on up to the President. So, as the only member of the State Department who'd been on Setem, I had to perform.

Yes, I'd been on Setem—once, for about three hours, on the first expedition to Alpha Centauri. That was enough. I wasn't a scientist, like the Harvard people out in that ship near the Moon studying a whole group of Setem people—too busy with facts to think about consequences. And I was no longer a carefree ship-slinger who took the bad with the good and forgot about it on the next trip.

I knew what would happen tomorrow when Gayla arrived. But

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it was too late to tell anybody. They'd set her up to be greeted by the Governor of New York and the Mayor of New York City, and to dedicate a bridge. My chief and I were in New York as an advance guard from Washington, where she'd go next. But I had a pretty good idea as to where Fairchild and I would go next—after tomorrow.

We'd be appointed consuls to the smallest city in the Belgian Congo.

I did what I could. I went to the dime store and laid in some purchases that would astound the State Department auditor. Then I visited a liquor store and went home and got diplomatically and properly drunk.

At the receiving pad next day, Gayla was a knockout, all right. About five-six with enormous blue eyes and golden hair that streamed like low-down sunshine. A figure that would be hot on sun-starved Pluto. A smile that was worth the four-light-year trip to Alpha Centauri.

She also wore the single Setem garment, a sheath that rippled provocatively in the breeze.

"My, my, look at those—that chest," said Ben Fairchild, his eyes hot coals.

"Just look," I groaned.

He gave me an odd glance and moved forward. Everybody moved forward, but my feet dragged. True, it was a great day for the human race, this meeting of another life-form from a planet in the Alpha system, exactly like the life-forms on Earth. The carbon cycle repeated, and all that. True, she was a looker, and I, a single man, was her escort. There wasn't even a language barrier. She knew English, had learned it on the four year trip, absorbing it in her long sleep. She'd been kept in a state of suspended animation during the space-jump, arriving as fresh as a Setem morn.

But I remembered my three hour stay on Setem and my feet dragged.

"It's considered a violent insult to speak a single word to Earth-people on the first meeting," I whispered to Gayla as she stepped forward from the ship.

Her serious eyes got big. "Oh!" she said and shut up. She nodded to everybody and everybody nodded to her and I took the Governor and the Mayor aside.

"It is considered a violent insult to speak a single word to a Setem on the first meeting," I told them. "She'll want to be silent for the first month or so."

The Mayor nodded, but the Governor blew up. "She'll have to speak at the bridge dedication, tradition or no," he said. "Not even a new life-form can be allowed to disappoint the voters of New York State!"

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"Especially in New York City!" echoed the Mayor.

"Not to mention our diplomatic duty to bring her words to the less fortunate nations on Earth," said Ben coming up. "Danny—tell her she'll have to say a few words as soon as we get over there."

I had done my patriotic best. I nodded. I told her. She pulled out a fourteen page stack of papers. "I happen to have some notes," she whispered.

Ben Fairchild took me aside. "Danny, she's a fifty-power pact, all in one cute package! That smile! Why, this is the beginning of a new era! Know what I did? Soon as I saw she could survive all right in our atmosphere, I sent word to invite the hundred Setems just arrived to study with the Harvard people near the Moon to come to the U.S. For a visit. I know they'll accept." He rubbed his hands. "And the U.S.A. gets 'em first!"

"You did *what!*" I cried.

"We'll call it the Friendship Group," he exulted.

I shuddered.

At the site of the ceremony, the Governor introduced Gayla. As she stepped forward, she was a doll, her blonde hair glossing in the sun and breeze, her body alive in the glittering sheath, cheeks flushed, lips opening . . .

I pulled out my harmonica, one of my dime store acquisitions, and blew softly on it. Fairchild, who sat beside me, looked up in astonishment.

"What are you doing?"

I'd thought the harmonica was concealed in my hand. But he'd caught the glint of it in the sun.

"Oh, just playing my harmonica," I said.

A nerve under one angry eye began to quiver at me. I knew I'd overdone it, so I had to stop.

Meanwhile, everybody listened to Gayla. The people, the illustrious visitors. A flush of pure pleasure showed on the faces around me. These Setems have a fairly tremendous chest cavity. I mean, they have *real* voices. Deep and resonant. It makes you feel good all over to hear those Centaurian voices run up and down the octaves. That such pure, liquid sound can pour from near-human lips is astounding. Even I, knowing what I did, was fascinated, remembering my first experience with those magnificent speaking organs.

Nobody moved. Nobody stirred as Gayla's rich tones carried forward on the public address system. I was watching the Mayor. As she got warmed up, Gayla began to hit the natural frequency of his skeleton. Setems love to resonate—they can't help it.

The poor old guy began to vibrate a little, here and there, jiggling in his seat as if he'd discovered a tack. He looked around in surprise to see who was shak-

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ing the platform, but everybody else was still, because every man's skeleton, like the rest of him, is a little different from all others. She was reaching only his frequency, and perhaps touching on a few others in the large crowd.

He reached up and mopped his brow, and I could see his teeth chatter in sympathetic vibration to her astoundingly loud oratorical tones. He began to click his heels in a private tap dance as Gayla went on. Suddenly she hit square in the middle of his range and set his whole skeleton going. He jumped up as if he were shot and began brushing off his clothes and slapping himself like a true bop man.

Everybody has felt, say, the vibratory effect of an organ in church. It can get sort of overwhelming. Well, this was a thousand times stronger. The Mayor was perspiring like a space-man on Mercury. He grinned too, because in a way it feels good to vibrate like that, but mostly you feel plain silly.

I sneaked out my harmonica again. I figured I could cancel her harmonicas with a soft little tune just for his ears—something to break the rhythm, but Fairchild loomed up at me.

"Danny! Have you gone mad? We've got a forty-piece band in case we need any music!"

I pointed to the Mayor, still hopping around. Now his aides thought he was stamping out a cigarette and they were all intently scanning the platform, some of them even stamping a little too.

Fairchild reached for his notebook. That was his official reprimand book, so I put away the harmonica. The Mayor was on his own.

It was only the beginning. Gayla left the Mayor's frequency —he crunched down in his chair with a sigh. But now she began to go after the glassware and street lights. The Governor had just raised a drink of the thin stuff to his lips when she vibrated his glass into a million glass crystals and he got a lapful of water. He jumped up, just as a near-by street light went *plaaaf*!, and he ducked like crazy and bounded over to my boss's chair.

"Somebody is shooting!" he cried softly.

"Nobody is shooting," said Fairchild, who immediately saw the negative publicity in such a disturbance. Anyway, the Governor wasn't from his political party.

"Somebody shot a glass from my hand," the Governor told one of the Mayor's aides in an agonized voice.

"I've got to help stamp out a cigarette," the aide apologized.

The Governor's aides were nosing around the platform and causing a general disturbance, so I stepped up to him.

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"Heat contraction," I said. "Seen it happen a dozen times on these hot platforms."

"That must be it," he said, white-faced but relieved. "Nobody would want to shoot me."

It wasn't his most convincing speech, but I grinned and pressed his arm reassuringly.

The Chief of his State Police now came up. "Anything wrong, sir?"

"It's all right," said the Governor. "A little heat contraction."

The Chief was a big, big man with gray hair and hard eyes behind black-framed glasses. Gayla, not missing much, came along just then with her voice, and the two lenses of the Chief's glasses didn't want to stay in their frames any more. *Ping*! *Pang*! The darting lenses bracketed the Governor, left and right, past his shoulders.

"What did you say?" squeaked the Governor, backing away from the police chief.

"Hey, now how about that!" cried the Chief. He swung around angrily, peering hard, but there was only me. "We'll get him!" he glowered at me. He swung around again to pursue whatever he was pursuing and tried to walk over Ben Fairchild, who was about as big as he was. It didn't work. Four hundred pounds of officialdom took the funeral parlor folding chair down with a bang.

Everybody shushed them. Meanwhile, something bounced over my shoulder. Gayla had moved on to take care of the TV networks. She got NBC, went up and cooled CBS and ABC and then went after the independents. The glass TV lenses just *planged!* right out of the equipment.

One lens lay at my feet, quivering like a live thing, pointing its desperate, glassy eye up at me.

Unfortunately she couldn't vibrate the microphones loose. They were made for vibration, and took all she could give them and asked for more—which she gave them.

I was the first one to hear the new bridge shake.

Gayla, her powerful voice thrice-thousand-fold amplified by the public address system, subconsciously felt her power over the structure and took delight in giving it hell. The whole billion dollars of it began to come alive. It sounded like distant thunder, and the Mayor anxiously looked at the sky and reached for his umbrella.

You'd have thought all these antics would've stopped her talk—but that's the hellish devilment of a Setem speaking voice. Hypnotic. Like the Governor being apologetic about somebody shooting at him, not wanting to stop the fluid flow of that marvelous near-human speech.

My boss and the policeman, now dusting each other off and

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shushing each other, stared at one another through the empty frames of their glasses as if this were the most natural thing in the world for them.

Gayla rolled on. She crossed the Mayor's frequency again and brought him off his chair for an encore, jiving it like a real cool cat.

"For God's sake, he's dropped another cigarette in his lap—why doesn't he give up smoking?" grumbled an aide wearily, getting up to join the jig.

I went to the Mayor and gave him some cotton from the dime store to stuff in his ears—cotton, you may be sure, that I had tightly snug in my own ears. "Nervous as a cat today," he smiled, thanking me.

"Man, you're ricocheting," I said. After all, if my boss had only listened to me . . .

People were passing out all over the crowd in vibratory ecstasy and the police were going after them. But the girl's head was bent upwards in delight and she was almost singing her oration:

"—grrrrreat frrrrrrrriendship of our peeeeeeeoples—"

The bridge began to go nuts. A slight wave went sweeping along the wire-taut suspension cables. The ribbon across the entrance, that was supposed to be cut, trembled. The bridge fought back now, but it rumbled ominously and the people were frightened and getting panicky, and yet were held in the grip of that golden voice.

That was when I stepped forward and began to play the "Star-Spangled Banner" loudly on my harmonica. Luckily the forty-piece band thought the speech was over and joined in. That finally stopped Gayla.

We got through the rest of the ceremony all right, except when it came to the ribbon-cutting. Gayla cut it all right, and cried in ecstasy. "I give you your new brrrrrrrridge!"

At that sound, the closest pylon cracked apart in friendly response to her voice, dissociated itself from the rest of the structure, and went slapping into the water.

Gayla looked surprised at this. So did everybody else.

"How clever," she said in a shocked voice, wondering what kind of a bridge we were trying to palm off on her. "How desperately clever!" Tears came to her eyes. "Is this a j-j-j-joke? Are you having fun with me?"

"Excuse me," said the Mayor, red-faced and exhausted. "I've just received word that vandals have shot out forty-eight street lights along Riverside Drive and someone is going around in this great crowd breaking plate glass window with a ball-peen hammer. Excuse me." He left.

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The Governor looked at the bridge in shock. "My dear young lady," he said. "There's no joke, Except on the State of New York. Somebody is selling the Road Department cement composed of flour and water. And they've tried to assassinate me. I promise you the damnedest corruption probe you've ever seen!"

And he stalked off with *his* aides.

"It's all right, honey," I said squeezing her arm. "Plenty of famous people have had bridges built in their honor, but up till now we haven't had anybody great enough to have one fall apart in her honor. You're way on top!"

Afterward Ben Fairchild and I had an urgent conference.

"Harmonicas for counter-harmony for all the Congressmen for tomorrow's speech," I suggested. "Unless we cancel the whole thing."

He groaned. "We can't. Two worlds are watching us, and Congress would get my job if I stopped the ceremony. But I can't put a harmonica in the hand of the President!"

"If you want your job, you'd better."

He licked his lips. "The Vice-President wears a hearing aid," he said. "Now what do you suppose she'll do to him?"

"He'll fly," I said, shuddering. He'll blast right through the Capitol dome and burst into fragments on the lawn."

"We'll tell her to speak in a whisper," he suggested.

"You can't," I said. "If you do, you hurt her feelings. If you hurt her feelings, she'll cry. And when a Setem cries—"

I tapped his chest for emphasis. He turned pale.

"Also," I said, "don't forget the Friendship Group. A hundred more Setems you've just invited to make speeches in the U.S.A. They're already on their way."

"Maybe they won't want to speak," he said.

"A Setem," I said, "has one desire in life. To speak. The Setems' whole culture is built on speech. Their buildings are composed of rubbery sound-absorbing materials. They speak at births, weddings and funerals. They graduate from school by outspeaking professors. They get jobs on the strength of resonance. And in a happy Setem marriage—" I tapped his chest— "it isn't sex that counts. It's the snore. When a Setem snores . . ."

He raised his hand weakly. "Danny," he said, "in this hour our country needs us."

Maybe you saw it on your television. The welcome that the President of the United States gave her. In her reply, Gayla hit the natural frequency of his skel-

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eton and he got up and executed a quick, neat do-si-do all alone on his platform. It was real homey. After that, she let him alone and went after the smaller fry.

I'll give the Vice-President credit for being a real man. When his hearing aid carried that voice right into his very bones he got up quietly and headed for the men's room still walking like a gentleman.

Down on the floor they got off a pretty good hoedown as Gayla began to reach in there and sock it to them. Senators who hadn't spoken to each other for years were jigging arm-in-arm in the aisles and the Speaker of the House got caught straight in the middle of trying to rap for order. Thereafter he continued to beat his gavel in two-four time. Some of them were weeping, some of them were laughing, and the galleries surged like a rooting section.

In the midst of that fury, I reached over and knocked a pitcher of water all over Gayla, who had so far missed the glassware that day. Maybe you saw that, but I'll bet you didn't see me shift that fan over to blow down the back of her neck. It didn't help; she didn't even notice it, though she began to get the sniffles right away. She kept on going.

Fortunately, a democracy is imperishable. The Capitol building began to creak and snap a little but it was never in danger.

It was my boss who finally made the supreme sacrifice. He leaned over in desperation and pinched Gayla on the behind—real hard. It was the most patriotic gesture of the day. She screeched and the skylight popped open and rained down glass, but after that she turned and slapped his face, and she was too wet and sniffly and insulted to go on—so we wound that one up in a hurry.

Later, much later, we had another meeting at State. This time the Secretary himself was there.

"It is my sad duty to inform you," said the Secretary, "that the President's personal physician has examined Gayla and she has a bad cold. Her speaking tour will have to be cancelled because of laryngitis."

"Larrrrryngitis!" Mr. Fairchild rolled the word lovingly on his tongue. "We'll have to start her back to Setem at once for treatment." Then he remembered to look sad again. "Of course, my wife plans to divorce me."

"But what about the President's seizure?" gloomed the Secretary. "I don't know how to explain that."

"He'll be all right if he stays away from exercise for a few days," said Mr. Fairchild. "He's a little stiff right now—"

"He was always a big—" the

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Secretary began and then caught himself. "All right, gentlemen. Anything else?"

"About the additional hundred Setems coming to earth," said Ben Fairchild. "I mean the Friendship Group. Uh—I have just been informed that they've changed their plans. Unfortunately Danny and I garbled some language in a message to them. They were highly insulted. They are *not* coming to visit the U.S.A. But, as you know, the diplomats of all countries have been trying to lure them away from us."

For the first time that day the Secretary visibly brightened. "And to what country have we unfortunately—er—lost the honor?"

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Fairchild, "perhaps I can answer that best by saying that I never cared much for the top-heavy Soviet Russian school of architecture, and now I have reason to think that something may be done about it. . . ."

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot

The Ismaili Institute of Higher Studies always rewarded the annual Hayworth Memorial Lecturer with his weight in diamonds —but only if he withstood the attacks of the faculty.

Ferdinand Feghoot, lecturing on "Space Colonization and the Human Emotions," ran this gantlet successfully in 2883. "Everywhere man has gone," he declared, "and no matter how he has changed, you always find some small, homey, nostalgic reminder of old Mother Earth."

At once he was challenged. "What about the planet *Candide*?" a professor demanded. "They are infidels, cannibals! How could anything there remind one of Earth?"

For an instant, Feghoot was taken aback. Then he smiled. "I would have said you were right," he replied, "if it hadn't been for one thing. As you know, the Candideans especially relish the plump juicy buttocks of slaves raised on large farms for the purpose. And it was on one of these farms that I saw something which took me right back to my boyhood, and brought tears to my eyes."

"What was it?" everyone asked.

"It stood on a shelf in the kitchen," sighed Ferdinand Feghoot. "It was just an old *Fanny Farmer's Cook Book*."

GRENDEL BRIARTON

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Readers of that wonderful, lamented magazine Unknown *may remember that the name Jane Rice used to appear there from time to time in the late '30s. Those that do will look forward eagerly to Mrs. Rice's first story in much too long a time. It offers four children from the future, a witch, a ghost, an unsettling sort of Moebius effect, and altogether a memorable experience.*

THE WILLOW TREE

by Jane Rice

WHEN THE FOUR O ÷ CHILDREN, Lucy, Robert, Charles, and May, were orphaned by a freak of circumstances, they were sent to live in the Past with two spinster relatives, ostensibly because of crowded conditions elsewhere. In reality, their archaic given names had suggested this quick solution to the overburdened Time & Welfare worker in charge of their case. True, the two elderly ladies were a bit, well, *unusual*—but they were kindly enough, and offered a pleasant home.

The children were quite young and therefore accepted the sudden death of both parents as a termination rather than a separation. They were told by their temporary foster, a well meaning ancient who remembered "Ohio," that their mother and father had "passed away." The children knew better. Their mother and father had died and had been numbered and encapsulated. "Away" was the Past, where they were going.

They missed their parents but they were really more accustomed to each other and, in childhood, it is impossible to dwell for long on absences, or grieve over them. Their sense of loss was further diminished by the excitement of their own quick departure into the Past (a hand waved, the keep dollied slowly backwards, the stabilizer moved in, a robivac began to count, the threads of goodbye were severed by a blue slice of brightening light), and their subsequent arrival at their destination which appeared to have been set down in the middle of nowhere.

"This," Charles observed, importantly, taking in his surround-

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ings, "is what was meant by 'country' when we were being synchronized at the Center."

"And 'isolation,'" Robert said. "We're 'isolated' in the 'country.'"

The children were charmed with the novel aspect of their environs and stared delightedly at their future home, a brooding old vine-shawled house which had mellowed into the untended landscape until it was scarcely visible from where they stood.

"Look," May exclaimed. "There's a truly pooskat!"

"Pussycat," Lucy corrected. "Use the proper obsoletes, May. Do you want the 'aunt' to think we're . . ." She paused, searching for the appropriate colloquialism.

"Lazyheads?" Charles conjectured.

"Headbones," Robert amended.

"*Bone*heads," Lucy sighed, full of her responsibilities as the eldest. "Pooskat, lazyheads, headbones. Mercy." She smoothed her "sash" and twitched May's "hair ribbon" straight. "Well, we can't stay stopspotted all day. Let's go. Okai?" She stepped forward, and the others followed.

Their Aunt Martha was a sweet faded shell of a woman who reminded Lucy of the fragile, white, transparent, moonsnow carvings that had decorated the Lunar exhibit at the Solar Fair. Her welcome was warm and enveloping, even though it was somewhat lopsided due to her habit of holding her head askew as if she were listening, or had strained a ligament in her neck.

"Oh, you've come . . . you've come," she kept murmuring over and over, bending from one to the other and touching them as if they were surprising flowers. "You've come at last."

Ushering them in to meet their other aunt in the shuttered library where she sat, slitting the pages of a book with an ivory cutter, their Aunt Martha's frail cadence was triumphant. "Harriet. The children are *here.*"

"So I see, Sister," their Aunt Harriet said. "So I see." She nodded pleasantly at them across the clutter of volumes on the desk. "And I'll wager they're ready for tea. Eh?"

They chorused assent, and Lucy, remembering a lesson from *Mores Of The Past,* appended, "Thank you," and, reaching out, grasped her Aunt Harriet's hand and shook it. It felt like a withered bouquet of knuckles, and Lucy decided that after this she would confine herself to the Past-custom of "the excuse-me."

"The children are ready for tea, Sister," their Aunt Harriet said. "The speculation arises, is the tea ready for the children?"

When their Aunt Martha had departed, in a fluster, their Aunt Harriet leaned back in her chair and addressed the children in her paper-dry voice.

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Her sister, she informed them, was not herself, upon occasion. She was prone to have . . . ah . . . notions. (She made a vapid three-fingered gesture to and fro in front of her forehead to indicate both the vaporous quality and the location of her sister's malaise.) Sister was easily upset by trifles, and, consequently, they were not to trouble her *on any account whatsoever.* Was this perfectly clear?

The children bobbed their heads. They had heard of the peculiar affliction (pronounced Kok'tāls') which had plagued the Past-people.

They could have full freedom of the house and grounds, their aunt continued, with but a single exception.

She pushed herself to her feet and leveled a skinny forefinger at a pair of closed double doors under which seeped a saffron chink of late sunlight, as if she were indicating an object that lay somewhere beyond, outside in the waning afternoon.

"If you wish to remain here, in peace, you must not play under the willow tree," she said.

Since this regulation was not too different from somewhat similar bygone rules, such as their mother's habitual admonition to stay on their own side of the ramp, or the downtown signals intoning "Don't escalate," the children did not question it. In fact, they immediately felt more at home, and Robert, emboldened, pointed at a feather peeping from the volume whose pages she had been cutting.

"What kind of a feather is that?" he inquired.

For an instant, as his aunt's eyelids flicked, he had the queer impression that he ought not've asked. Maybe he ought've stuck on a "Yesm." Or not be pointing. Embarrassed, he ran the offending finger under an imaginary drip on the end of his nose.

However, extending her hand, his aunt extracted the feather and stroked it, half-smiling, as if recalling an amusing long-ago incident.

"A peacock's feather," she answered in a recollective tone. "I put it there as a bookmark; once upon a time."

"Do you have peacocks?" May wanted to know.

"Peacocks are extinct," Charles told her.

"Poo — pussycats are extinct, too," May said, "but we saw one, didn't we? A black one."

"At present, we have no peacocks," their aunt said. "Unlike willows, they are difficult to . . . raise."

"See?" Charles said to May. "I told you."

Their aunt held the feather out to Robert. "Would you like to have it?"

"Yesm," Robert said, taking the

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proffered gift. It felt dusty and stiff and, never having owned a peacock's feather before, he grew warm and shy, and, boylike, slipped it inside his "shirt."

"Do peacocks be extinct, Aunt?" May pressed, reluctant to concede.

"Nothing is ever quite what it seems to be," her aunt replied.

"See?" May said to Charles.

During their "tea," with "Sister," in the big funny old "kitchen," Robert removed the feather for a closer inspection. Had the children not been forewarned, Sister's reaction to this "trifle" would have dried the food in their mouths.

"Where did you get that?" she whispered, showing her teeth, her head cocked at an alarming angle. "The peacocks were destroyed. Destroyed! I thought if I destroyed the peacocks—" She broke off, and snatched the feather from him, repeating, "Where did you get this? Tell me!"

But, even while he was explaining, she removed a stove lid from the range and thrust the feather into the glowing coals, holding it down with a long handled fork until it was consumed. When she returned to the table she was obviously shaken.

"Children," she breathed, her hands pressed against her throat, "listen to me. *You must never play under the willow tree.*"

"Yes, we know," Lucy said, in the soothing inflection their mother had used when one of the children had needed comforting.

Any lingering doubts they may have entertained concerning the nature of Sister's "notions" were quelled by her fits and starts of odd behavior within the first few weeks. There was the morning when she had come upon May's doll which May, playing "sewing machine," had used for a pincushion. There was the day she had found Charles' list of Past-curiosities that weren't extinct (toads 12, snakes 5, bats 6 pr., newts 9, owls 2, pussycats 1, lizards 23, spiders, flies, etc.) and had thought he was going to cook these things in a "recipe." And the day she had yanked a galloping Lucy off a frazzled broom she'd discovered and was using for a "cowboy." And the day she'd nearly had a faint when May, puzzling over an old tome she'd dredged up from the bottom of a bin in the storeroom, had asked her the meaning of a word. "What are you doing with a spelling book?" she had cried. "Where did you get it? Give it to me. Give it to me this minute!"

Once, through the bannisters, they had watched her listening to the grandfather's clock on the stair landing, her ear pressed flat against the empty and tickless case. Another day, when Charles

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had made a silly noise, she had come rushing, muzzy from her nap, believing she had heard a peacock's cry. Lucy had led her back to her bedroom, as if she, Lucy, were Sister, and Sister a child. "The peacocks are gone. All gone," Lucy had reassured her patiently. "The peacocks aren't here anymore."

Aunt Martha—Sister—was constantly touching them, as if to convince herself that they were real children and not figments of a warped imagination. Sometimes she disappeared and was gone for hours, and sometimes she called to them frequently, apparently thinking they might have left, or hadn't come yet, or had gotten lost around a crook in Time, which she seemed to visualize as a sort of circle with a half-twist to it . . . like the Moebius Ride at the Solar Fair, Lucy thought. *Exactly* like the Moebius Ride, on which everything had been straight and turny, simultaneously, and where in spite of the fact that there was only one riding surface the riders had whizzed roundabout on two sides of it and yet nobody had been upside down. And May had gotten stomachy and their father had bought them each a stick of oxygen candy. Later, he had showed them the way the ride worked. He had given a narrow strip of paper a half twist and adhesed the ends. Then, with a penl he had drawn a continuous line down the middle of the looping strip to demonstrate how, without ever lifting the penl from the paper, the line could be made to somehow go over and under without ever going over and under at all. Except that it did! Charles had made a sing of it that went:

> The Moebius ride goes
> roundabout
> and over and under and
> inside out
> But, strange to say, there's
> just one side
> To the loopty loopty
> Moebius ride!

Funny, how dim the previous had become. Almost like a Sister-dream. Poor fuddled Sister.

They were fond of her, but gradually they drifted into the practice of avoiding her as much as they were able, and the trackless days flowed one into the other. By then, without having to be told, they had also learned not to bother their Aunt Harriet. Besides, she had a way of turning the points of words so that they sounded like riddles, which made what she said *hear* like it wasn't what she meant. "Today was tomorrow yesterday." What kind of an answer was that to the query, what day is today? "If wherever you are is here, is there here when you are there?" What could you make of a question like that? And she had two stock rejoinders

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for bulwarks. "Nothing is ever quite what it seems," and "Run along, now."

They had no intention of playing under the willow tree. There was such a plentitude of permissible territory to explore. The wild over-grown garden was a fascinating pathless wonderland with a snake hole by the toppled and moldering "sundial." There was the tumbled stone fence for a "fort," a shallow "pond" where they could "fish" and skip flat rocks and do wading. There were clover crowns and daisy chains to fashion, real clouds to watch, little sunning lizards to tickle with a grassblade, an "attic" for rainy days, trunks and drawers filled with musty treasures . . .

Yet, as the summer lengthened, the *idea* of the willow tree began to weigh on them. Somehow, the willow tree was always there.

They would be fishing contentedly in the pond and a yellow-green willow leaf, borne by a vagrant breeze, would drop on the still surface to float among the cloud reflections and the skimming dragonflies—a tiny t-tinsie reminder that they mustn't play under the willow tree. Or, trying to settle on where to have a "picnic," they would fall quiet thinking . . . anywhere, except under the willow tree. And, tiring of a game or a sham-battle or a chase and flopping down to consider what-to-do next they would think, *we must not go under the willow tree.*

Once, caught in an unexpected downpour and racing up to the house through the hard pelting rain the thought had struck them, like a four-pronged fork of lightning, *we could take shelter under the willow tree*—but Sister had come out on the back porch and had motioned to them to hurry-hurryhurry and they had run on. Again, one breathlessly hot interminable day when the heat rose in shimmers everywhere, May had put their ruminations into words.

"I'll bet it's cool under the willow tree," she said, wiping her sweaty little face on her sleeve. "I'll bet it's *damned* cool."

"Let's—" Charles began.

"No," Lucy said, reeling in the beetle she had been flying at the end of a string. "You know it's a rule not to. And quit making up words, May. Use the ones we've got."

"I didn't make it up," May said. "It was in that old speller book Sister took away from me."

"What's it mean, then?"

"It means you get your mouth washed out with soap and water," May said.

"That doesn't seem very reasonable," Lucy said, not caring. It was too hot to care. She plopped her listless beetle in the shade of a toadstool and fanned him with a wilted dandelion.

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"That's not the only thing around here that isn't very reasonable," Robert said, rolling over on his elbows to peer in the direction of the forbidden challenge, like a green spilling fountain, trailing its leafy curtain of stirring tendrils invitingly on the parched grass.

"I don't know what you three are going to do," Charles announced, "but I know what *I'm* going to do. Right this second."

They gazed at him, unbelieving. He *wouldn't* . . . no matter how cool it might be under the willow tree, he wouldn't *dare* . . .

"I'm going to go—" he grinned mischieviously at them — "belly-whop in the pond," he finished. He sprinted off, shouting over his shoulder, "Last one in is a scare-poos!"

Thus, finally, like a fly in amber, the ? of the willow was imbedded in their minds. Always *there* . . . A dark fleck in the middle. The core. The one central spot. The focal point. The place. Until, one afternoon, engaged in a wild spontaneous game of Follow-the-Leader that had started in the ruined garden, they went streeling up the lane and over the fence and back again and around the arbor and into the barn and climb the ladder and jump from the loft and circle the pond and splash across and tag the well and duck under the sweep and leap the stump and whirl about to veer away down the slope and under the willow tree . . . almost without thinking, as if they had thought about it for so long that it had become the most familiar place of all.

When they emerged their faces were pale and sick. Lucy's hair lay plastered in damp rings against her brow and she was shivering. A trickle of blood oozed from Roberts' lower lip where he had bitten it. May began to cry and Charles, burnt-eyed and white toothed, lifted a leaden arm and pointed at the house, where, from a downstairs window, their Aunt Harriet beckoned to them.

The children, having assembled in a line before their aunt in the library, waited like stones for her to speak. But she only sat, savoring their expressions, while the silence stretched longer and thinner and tauter to be broken at last by May who buried her tear-stained cheeks in Lucy's skirt and sobbed, "I want to go home . . . I want to go back home . . ."

Their aunt smiled as if at a witty joke. "Kindly control yourself, May, lest you disturb Sister, who does not like to remember that, by destroying the peacocks out of their Time, she inadvertently destroyed a rather large segment of continuity and warped the joining. Did you hear me, May? I said to control yourself,

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lest you disturb Sister. Sister—"

". . . *is hanging under the willow tree!*" May screamed.

"—especially does not like to be reminded that she is a ghost," their aunt said, equably.

"And you, you are an old w . . . *witch,*" Charles said in horror.

The truth having been concretized by words, the children backed away, backed, backed slowly away, and suddenly turned and fled. Looking like blurred photographs of themselves in the tarnished mirror in the hall, they ran past the curving staircase and the age-dimmed oil portraits and out the door that stood open to the fragrant late summer air. Across the splintery veranda and down the sagging steps they went, past the library where their Aunt Harriet, book in hand, watched them from the threshold of the great double door flung wide like shadowing wings behind her.

Past the garden they streaked, eyed by the cat, and down the slope, and, when Lucy began to untie her sash, May started to weep disconsolately, and Robert, hitching up his "belt," stopped and lifted her and carried her in his arms. Without a single backward glance they hastened on, and, simply because they could not stay and did not know what else to do, they all went under the willow tree.

"Where are the children?" Sister wanted to know from the threshold of the double doors where she stood tying on a fresh apron, her countenance still vague with sleep. "I can't find them anywhere. I've called and called. Have you seen them, Harriet?"

Harriet, seated on the garden

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bench, glanced up from the book she was reading. "Yes. And . . . no," she said.

"You either have or you haven't, Harriet. Why must you always be so, oh, round-about. Do you know where they are?"

"Are? No. They . . . were . . . swinging under the willow tree."

"The willow tree," Sister said in a hushed, frightened tone that died on a caught breath, and was superseded by a perplexed expression. "Willow tree? What willow tree, Harriet? We have no willow tree." She rubbed her hand across her puckered brow as if to knead out a kink in her train of thought. "The children—" she began on a bewildered note and stopped, her puzzled eyes fixed on the mincing peacock whose furled plumes tip-tailed the gravel garden path. Her gaze grew hazy and questioning, then blank.

She gave her head a slight shake as though to clear it.

"We have no willow tree," she reiterated stubbornly.

Harriet inserted a slim forefinger between the pages of her book. "Then I must raise one, presently, to have it ready for them when they come."

"When who comes, dear?"

"The children, Sister."

"Oh. Oh, yes. Of course. It all seems . . ." she frowned, hunting for the correct word.

"Roundabout," said Harriet.

"Thank you," her sister said.

"Thank *you*," Harriet replied. She arose and strolled to the marble sundial where she consulted the slanting shadow of Time. The peacock, strutting ahead of her, quickened its promenade.

Stooping, Harriet retrieved a bright fallen feather and put it in her book to mark the place.

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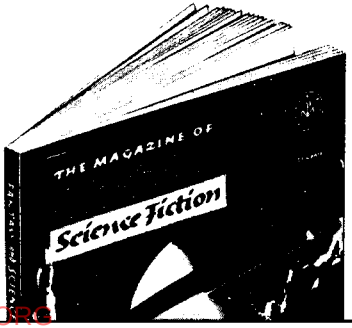

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